

The Road from George Orwell: His Achievement and Legacy

Alberto Lázaro
Editor

PETER LANG

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Alberto Lázaro (ed.)

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Preface

Following a tradition that goes back to 1987, the Department of English Philology at the University of Alcalá, Madrid, organised the *VIIIth Conference on English Literature* in May 2000. On this occasion, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of George Orwell's death, a wide range of papers on this significant and controversial literary figure were presented. The main purpose of the conference was to re-examine George Orwell's work and thought in the light of contemporary theoretical concerns, as well as to discuss the mark he has left in British literature in the second half of the twentieth century, particularly on political satire and the development of dystopian fiction.

Fifty years after his death, George Orwell is generally recognised as a leading exponent of twentieth-century English prose and one of the most influential satiric writers whose works have merited detailed scholarly attention. A wide range of editions of his novels, essays, journalism and autobiographical works are within the reach of the general reader, and his art has been discussed by numerous critics and literature specialists from many different approaches. There is no doubt that one of the reasons for the lasting appeal of his work lies in the qualities of its prose, as John Fowler suggests in *The Language of George Orwell* (1995), an excellent study of the writer's style. But it seems to me that Orwell is recognised more as a political writer than a master of style, although it cannot be denied that his writing is of excellent quality. Regarding his politics, Orwell seemingly managed to serve different Cold War political ideologies simultaneously, as Alex Zwerdling suggests in his analysis of the writer's left-wing ideas entitled *Orwell and the Left* (1974). Then, when the year 1984 came, critics celebrated Orwell and discussed his dystopian 'predictions,' like Tom Winnifrith and William Whitehead in *1984 and All's Well?*

(1984). Finally, in the closing years of the twentieth century political issues continue to be at the very forefront of Orwell criticism in such books as Paras Mani Singh's *George Orwell as a Political Novelist* (1987), Adriaan M. de Lange's *The Influence of Political Bias in Selected Essays of George Orwell* (1992) and Stephen Ingle's *George Orwell: A Political Life* (1993). Most of the papers presented at the Orwell conference in Alcalá also testify to the political controversy that his work has continued to arouse.

The present volume contains a selection of twelve of the papers that were read during the conference. They have been divided into two thematically arranged sections. While other divisions suggested themselves, I settled on the present organisation as best hinting at the central aim of the individual pieces. The essays of the first section entitled 'Re-Evaluations' provide new insights and fresh ways of viewing familiar issues such as Orwell's controversial political thought, the representation of race and gender in his early fiction, the narrative strategies of his documentary prose and the impact of censorship on his writing. The second group of essays explores the legacy of Orwell's dystopian fiction in later novelists like Zoë Fairbairns, Alasdair Gray, Robert Harris, Julian Barnes and Ben Elton, as well as issues of history and language that are raised in Orwell's writings and dominate twentieth-century fiction.

In the opening piece, 'The Road to Utopia, or On Orwell's Idealism,' Fernando Galván offers a key to understanding the political and aesthetic contradictions of Orwell's complex personality. The apparent inconsistencies and paradoxes in Orwell's thought and work, it is argued, are the product of his inveterate idealism and the continuous process of change in which he lived. Galván also goes on to draw a parallel between Orwell's idealism and the quixotic spirit. All this is thoroughly developed and supported with an analysis of some of Orwell's essays and journalism, his war memoir *Homage to*

Catalonia, and the traces left by his Spanish experience in his late fiction.

In a similar vein, the second essay, 'A Revolutionary in Love with the 1900s: Orwell in Defence of "Old England"' by Christine Berberich, also addresses the apparent contradiction of a Socialist Orwell with revolutionary ideas admitting sentimental feelings for a pre-1914 England. Orwell is seen here as a writer who managed to combine in a unique way his adherence to progressive Socialist principles and a conservative patriotism for things English. Berberich thus provides a straightforward account of the centrality of 'Englishness' to Orwell's world view, particularly as it is expressed in essays such as 'My Country Right or Left,' *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 'As I Please,' 'Notes on Nationalism,' 'Such, Such Were the Joys,' *The English People* and some of his London Letters to *Partisan Review*, as well as his novel *Coming Up for Air*.

The following two essays are devoted to Orwell's account of the Spanish Civil War, *Homage to Catalonia*. Miquel Berga, in 'Orwell's Catalonia Revisited: Textual Strategies and the Eyewitness Account,' suggests that Orwell's book on Spain should not only be viewed as a valuable historical document, but also as a central literary work of the 1930s that makes use of a series of carefully planned textual strategies. Berga shows how, more than sixty years after its publication, *Homage to Catalonia* can be read as a postmodernist text of metahistory, in which Orwell very effectively assumes the dual process of 'narrativising history and historicising narrative.' On the other hand, my essay 'George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*: A Politically Incorrect Story,' focuses on the troubled publishing history of this book in Spain and the difficulties it had with the Spanish censorship office during the Franco regime, until a much distorted version was published in 1970. After discussing the multiple cuts and changes indicated by the censors, the article ends with a denunciation of present-day Spanish and

Catalan editions, which have consistently maintained the censored editions of the Franco regime.

The two articles that follow seek to re-evaluate Orwell's first novel, *Burmese Days*, from postcolonial and feminist perspectives. Ana Moya's 'George Orwell's Exploration of Discourses of Power in *Burmese Days*' deals with issues of race and gender and questions the extent to which Orwell's critique of the Empire in the novel works effectively as a critique of domination. On the one hand, she identifies the protagonist of the novel, John Flory, as a key figure in Orwell's attack on imperialism: Flory rejects the Empire as a form of racial domination. Yet, he is shown to be in need of asserting his role as traditional male and, therefore, to be unable to break through the gender discourse, which accepts a similar type of domination. Similarly, Urmila Seshagiri's essay, 'Misogyny and Anti-Imperialism in George Orwell's *Burmese Days*,' also explores what she calls 'the novel's central inconsistency': the fact that *Burmese Days* confines its criticism against British imperialism to relationships between men, but fails to consider the sexual violence against women across Empire's territories.

Among the participants in the conference was Zoë Fairbairns, a distinguished fiction writer who has successfully published several novels and short stories. Her narrative has been seen by critics as an articulate exponent of feminist literature, consciously shaped by her concern with the problems faced by women, whether they be women of the future, the past or today. Fairbairns has approached her portraits of women through different novelistic modes: the political dystopia in *Benefits* (1979), the crime thriller in *Here Today* – which won the 1985 Fawcett Book Prize –, the historical family saga in *Stand We at Last* (1983) and *Daddy's Girls* (1991). The essay that opens the second part of this volume is a transcript of her lecture. Questions from the audience and Fairbairns's answers are transcribed as well. The title of this piece, '1984 Came and Went,' is a quotation from *Benefits* that refers to the famous year

in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In her essay Fairbairns considers how and why she wrote *Benefits*, a feminist dystopia that shows a future world in which women's lives are completely controlled by a totalitarian patriarchal state that exerts absolute control over women's fertility. She also reflects upon the ways in which she was influenced by the work of Orwell. Then, Beatriz Domínguez García in 'The Retelling of History Through Her Story' expands on Fairbairns's use of history in *Stand We at Last*. Comparison of this novel with Kate Atkinson's *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* (1995) shows that women's history has been alien to the description of the events that have characterised the twentieth century. These feminist rewritings of history, of course, seem very distant from Orwell's treatment of history in his social and political fiction.

Elizabeth Russell also discusses gender politics and issues of history in 'Looking Backwards and Forwards from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: Women Writing Men's Worlds'. She focuses her analysis on four feminist dystopias, which are presented as women's nightmarish visions of men's worlds. Two of these novels, Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) and Montserrat Julió's *Memòries d'un futur bàrbar* (1975), describe the extinction of the human race from the point of view of the last man alive on earth. The other two futuristic dystopian novels, Charlotte Haldane's *Man's World* (1926) and Katherine Burdekin's *Swastika Night* (1937), were written in the interwar period and both reduce women's social identity to their biological function. Although different in style and scope, these feminist anti-utopias appear as important points of reference in analyses of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

The last three articles study the echoes of Orwell's dystopian vision in several recent novelists. Sonia Villegas's essay, "History Is Not a Thing of the Past": The Theory and Practice of Historical Discourse in Alasdair Gray's *A History Maker*, reveals how the Scottish novelist Alasdair Gray recovered the Orwellian legacy in *A History Maker* (1994),

exploiting a new vision of history as the ‘true’ postmodern concern. Juan Francisco Elices in ‘The Satirical and Dystopic Legacy of George Orwell in Robert Harris’s *Fatherland*’ compares and contrasts the satiric targets and strategies of Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Robert Harris’s *Fatherland* (1992). Lastly, Ben Clarke’s essay, ‘Orwell and the Evolution of Utopian Writing,’ sets out to consider the effects of the association of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* with Cold War propaganda on subsequent dystopian writers, such as Robert Harris, Julian Barnes and Ben Elton.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank once again all the people and institutions that helped make both the conference itself as well as the publication of the proceedings possible. I am deeply in debt to the University of Alcalá, which provided us with the Colegio San Ildefonso as a fitting background for the delivery of the papers, and particularly to the Vicerrectorado de Investigación, which together with the Department of Modern Philology and the Spanish Ministry of Education helped publish this volume. I am also very grateful for the financial support the conference received from the British Council in Madrid, which contributed in a major way to including the writer Zoë Fairbairns in our programme. A word of thanks is also due to the English poet William Blake, who suggested the title of the conference and this volume, playing a pun on Orwell’s book *The Road to Wigan Pier*. Last, but not least, it is my most pleasant duty to thank those friends and colleagues who contributed papers, and particularly Ben Clarke and Elizabeth Russell for all the assistance they gave me with the proof reading of this edition.

Alberto Lázaro
Alcalá de Henares, January 2001

Part I: Re-Evaluations

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The Road to Utopia, or On Orwell's Idealism

The description of George Orwell as an honest and sincere man, as well as an indefatigable fighter for the underdogs and liberty, is well known.¹ That is the most usual image we get of the writer, a portrait that immediately attracts romantic and idealistic young people, who find in him a model to imitate. But curiously enough I think it is that idealism, so peculiar in his production and personal evolution, that makes him a paradoxical or contradictory man, and his works as an artist also paradoxical in relation to his public statements as an essayist or critic. Much has already been written on this that I am not going to tackle here (see Voorhees); but let just simply remember that according to some critics he was incapable of understanding reality, as reality 'actually is.' Of course poststructuralism has taught us to face that sort of statements with scepticism. Orwell might have seemed incompetent to analyse and interpret reality as the accepted views upon reality take it to be. But we know that what the majority presents as 'reality' is not necessarily the whole truth. Orwell himself proved this on innumerable occasions, and I shall make reference to some of them in this paper.

It is obvious, on the other hand, that there are indeed contradictions in Orwell, as in many other idealists, contradictions that arise from the confrontation between ideas and reality. A careful reading of his books, essays and private correspondence shows that he defends opposite things on

1 I am grateful to Alberto Lázaro for his comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this paper.

different occasions. His own aesthetic attitudes – not to mention his involvement with politics, which is better known – reveals some of those contradictions. An example of this contradictory aesthetics is Orwell's admiration for Joyce's *Ulysses*, which takes him to the extreme of writing chapter three of his novel *A Clergyman's Daughter* in imitation of Joyce. It seems to me a contradiction and, in the particular case of *Clergyman's Daughter*, also an aesthetic failure, especially if we take into account Orwell's ideological and aesthetic commitments in his other writings of the period (see Alldritt). We cannot forget that throughout the thirties Orwell denounces imperialism in *Burmese Days* (1934), the life of poverty and destitution in slums in *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), the moral, educational and intellectual penury of the times in *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935) and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936); and he even writes a documentary book on the depressed areas of northern England, devastated by unemployment and famine, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1936). All this indicates that Orwell belongs truly with the group of writers socially committed in this period; but his behaviour seems rather peculiar. Although he never rejects at that time an overtly political kind of writing (he will do it later, in the forties), he also paradoxically defends the opposite, as it happens in his essay 'Inside the Whale,' published in March 1940:

The passive attitude will come back and it will be more consciously passive than before. Progress and reaction have both to be mere swindles. Seemingly there is nothing left but quietism – robbing reality of its terrors by simply submitting to it. Get inside the whale – or rather, admit you are inside the whale (for you *are*, of course). Give yourself over to the world-process, stop fighting against it or pretending that you control it; simply accept it, endure it, record it. That seems to be the formula that any sensitive novelist is now likely to adopt. A novel on more positive, 'constructive' lines, and not emotionally spurious, is at present very difficult to imagine. ('Inside the Whale' 48-49)

After his 'committed' works of the thirties just mentioned, how can Orwell write the Joycean episode in *Clergyman's Daughter* and make this kind of statement? How can he preach inhibition, the total yielding to the 'world-process'? Is it perhaps because his works of the forties, after he came to Spain, show a detachment from – an abandonment of – his previous positions? But no; a simple glance at the novels and essays of the forties immediately corrects this initial and false impression: *Animal Farm* (1945), *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), and even such an exceptional novel as *Coming Up for Air* a bit earlier (1939), reveal the continuation of the critical line begun with *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) (Galván 135-66).

If so, then, the conclusion would rather be that Orwell had no firm aesthetic or ideological foundations, that he is indeed contradictory: he preaches one thing and does another. He acts moved by the passion of the events, on the spur of the moment. He usually obeys his impulses, his instincts, more than his reason. At the time he was writing *A Clergyman's Daughter*, he felt bewitched by *Ulysses* and thus he imitated it, betraying his artistic practice and his fidelity to other aesthetic models. Then he feels drawn to Henry Miller's position, an artist who claims the right to inhibition in a world dominated by materialism, because he is convinced that nothing positive can be done to stop the irresistible advance of the destructive forces. Orwell does not follow Miller in his vital attitudes, of course, but he has neither the arguments, nor the energy to oppose his views dialectically. Orwell's activity as a literary critic, which was wide throughout his career, offers further evidence about this contradiction. He is not a reliable critic, if by reliable we mean a critic who applies a particular set of rules to the analysis and interpretation of literary texts. You never know what you'll find in a new piece of critical writing by Orwell, because – as George Woodcock put it –

against evaluative and formal criticism he practised descriptive and discriminative criticism. The important thing about any book and any

author is what makes him individual, and so criticism has to be pragmatic; it cannot proceed according to set rules. And between writer and writer it is the differences in quality, which can never be determined exactly, that are important. (236-37)

This is just an example of the contradictions that characterise Orwell, and that many critics use in order to point to that incapacity to deal with reality. But, to my mind, those contradictions are merely a reflection of an idealist's attitudes, that may look similar to those you find in a young man or woman, who being immature and with a scarce knowledge of the world, feels entangled by different and opposite conceptions. That is the apparent image we get of Orwell, an image that is however superficial. I'll try to show why.

Orwell's contradictions are not the product of a passing whim, but rather the consequence of the continuous process of change in which he lives, caused by his fear of being trapped by fixed ideas. This is more comprehensible if we are aware of the true nature of Orwell. He is primarily a man of action, not of thought; he is clearly no philosopher, no politician; he follows no particular ideology. That is to say, thinking and talking are not enough for him. He needs action, to *do* things. Orwell seems to me to belong to that sort of people who, even though they can think rationally, coldly, and can be convinced by reason, when the time for action comes, however, they forget the cold reasonings and act with their hearts, guided by their ideals. Don Quixote is probably the prototype of that sort of idealist, a man who, forgetting the advice of his friends and family, launches himself into the world in order to fight for the sake of the weak and poor who suffer injustice. In the same way as Don Quixote is not hesitant when his squire Sancho Panza tells him that the giants he wants to destroy are not giants but windmills, so Orwell has no doubts at all, although Henry Miller tells him not to go to Spain: 'He merely told me in forcible terms that to go to Spain at that moment was the act of an idiot' ('Inside the Whale' 40). That happens in Paris in 1936, when Orwell was

already on his way to Spain. Our writer pays no attention, and goes on with his purpose, finally arriving in Spain in December 1936. It is probably an unreasonable attitude, because from a practical point of view very little could be done by Orwell, all by himself, with no connections, in a war that was completely alien to him. The writer, nevertheless, feels he must be faithful to his ideals and cannot take another position. Don Quixote also pretended to change the world, to right all wrongs, with the mere help of his arms and resolution.

Curiously enough again, this comparison between Orwell and the Spanish Don is not merely whimsical, but responds to well documented facts. It is not only the adventurous nature of both, the English writer and Cervantes' character, that makes them so similar – both leave their homes and come out into the world to defend the weakest, the underdogs. There is also a surprising similarity in physiognomy, pointed out by some critics and biographers. George Woodcock, for instance, who met Orwell and was one of his closest friends near the end of his life, comments in the first part of his book *The Crystal Spirit* on the common features shared by the Spanish hidalgo and Orwell: their slim figures, their height, their skinny faces, etc. (11-12). Some writers have even talked about the resemblance between the famous drawings by Doré and Eric Blair (Díez 71); Paul Potts, for example, wrote: 'there was something about him, the proud man apart, the Don Quixote on a bicycle [...] that caught one's imagination right away. That made one think of a knight errant and of social justice as the Holy Grail' (qtd. in Oxley 22). Also Sant Singh Bal has written: 'To the end he remained a small-time Don Quixote in search of the ideals that kept receding over the horizons' (45).

No wonder then that similarly to the spirit that takes Don Quixote to start his journeys, Orwell also has parallel motives that make him plunge himself into the slums of Paris and London, in order to get acquainted with genuine destitution. How can one forget his visit to the depressed areas of northern

England, where he got acquainted with unemployed workers, with their hard lives of misery and famine? It is true that *The Road to Wigan Pier* was commissioned, but Orwell accepted it and made it because his ideas were very much in tune with that quixotic spirit. It is again the same spirit that illustrates the meditations in 'Shooting an Elephant' or 'A Hanging' or *Burmese Days* about the evils of British imperialism in Asia. All of them are – as can be seen – scarcely 'realistic' or 'practical' attitudes. They were not understood by his contemporaries, by his friends and family, who almost took him for a madman, like Don Quixote. Those familiar with his works will probably remember his sharp indictment of the left in *The Road to Wigan Pier* or of imperialism and his own countrymen in his first novel or the short stories mentioned (Galván 31-46). I won't give more details for the time being, but will return later to *The Road to Wigan Pier* in order to recall Orwell's unorthodox politics.

Orwell's decision to come to Spain to fight against Fascism is also coloured with similar shades of quixotism. The Civil War starts in July 1936, and almost immediately, in December, Orwell is in Barcelona, just a few months after his wedding. He leaves his wife behind, in England, without any financial stability. Like Don Quixote, who had to sell a part of his hacienda to become a knight, Orwell pawns his family's silver cutlery and accepts an advance of £150 from Fredric Warburg, the only publisher who trusted him (Pryce-Jones 145).

Although his first plans were to write newspaper articles on the war, his arrival in Barcelona makes him change his opinion at once: 'I had come to Spain with some notion of writing newspaper articles, but I had joined the militia almost immediately, because at that time and in that atmosphere it seemed the only conceivable thing to do' (*Homage* 8). So, instead of feeling disappointed in a town that was experiencing a deep social revolution, where order and organisation were unknown, where the militias of the various political parties and trade unions were stronger than the Army of the Republic, led by

Socialists and Communists, Orwell feels an immediate identification and sympathy with what he sees. Very soon he will know what a disorganised army means, and will understand that that kind of army, with no single or unified command, is totally ineffective to defeat Fascists; but all the same he enjoys the atmosphere of equality that he breathes in Catalonia at the time. One of the most powerful memories of this early involvement with the war is Orwell's contact with an Italian militiaman when he joins the militias of the P.O.U.M.. He relates the incident in the first page of *Homage to Catalonia*, and his description says a lot about his connection with Spain, his inveterate idealism. He starts by giving a physical description of the young militiaman and all of a sudden he shifts into a sort of spiritual epiphany:

Something in his face deeply moved me. It was the face of a man who would commit murder and throw away his life for a friend – the kind of face you would expect in an Anarchist, though as likely as not he was a Communist. There were both candour and ferocity in it; also the pathetic reverence that illiterate people have for their supposed superiors. [...] I hardly know why, but I have seldom seen anyone – any man, I mean – to whom I have taken such an immediate liking. [...] As we went out he stepped across the room and gripped my hand very hard. Queer, the affection you can feel for a stranger! It was as though his spirit and mine had momentarily succeeded in bridging the gulf of language and tradition and meeting in utter intimacy. I hoped he liked me as well as I liked him. [...] I mention this Italian militiaman because he has stuck vividly in my memory. With his shabby uniform and fierce pathetic face he typifies for me the special atmosphere of that time. He is bound up with all my memories of that period of the war – the red flags in Barcelona, the gaunt trains full of shabby soldiers creeping to the front, the grey war-stricken towns farther up the line, the muddy, ice-cold trenches in the mountains. (*Homage* 7-8)

This impression, recalled by the writer in the first pages of *Homage to Catalonia*, is so strong that he will not be able to forget it. A few years later, in 1943, when he writes his essay 'Looking

Back on the Spanish War,' he returns to the Italian militiaman, and comments that people like him are those who really lost the war, the people who were fighting 'to win the decent life which they knew to be their birth-right' (*Homage* 243). A 'decent life' is what he fights for in Spain, that is, for the improvement of the lives of the underdogs, of the illiterate men with no jobs, the people who suffer injustice. Don Quixote also started his journeys with that purpose of 'desfacer entuertos,' to undo all evils, to redress injustice in the world, to right all wrongs.

We can say then that Orwell is moved by a quixotic ideal, since he comes to Spain by himself, like Cervantes' hero in his first sally. Orwell is not associated to any political group, such as the International Brigades; he does not belong to an organised army; he is not in the company of writers or artists during his journey or stay in Spain, unlike Hemingway, Dos Passos, Auden, etc. He, like Don Quixote, seems a knight errant who seeks for the Holy Grail of Decency and Justice, and makes his personal war against Fascism. He opposed those in positions of power, even those who might have helped him, very much the same as the Spanish Don, who only felt committed to his principles and challenged the rest. It is important – I think – to emphasise this fact of being alone, because Orwell's view of the war would probably have been quite different, and possibly not so interesting, had he joined the International Brigades. We would have had an account of battles, perhaps, or of the high morale among the Republican army and the civilians, or a book of Leftist propaganda. But *Homage to Catalonia* is beyond all that. As it happened, Orwell entered Spain with a letter of introduction from the ILP (Independent Labour Party), which was a party on the left of the Labour Party. The ILP had some connections with the Spanish P.O.U.M., a minor group of Communists with no relation at all to the official Communist Party. The Spanish Communist Party was then dominated by Moscow, and was

more interested in the consolidation of the Spanish democracy than in the social revolution that was in process.

That allegiance to the ILP allowed Orwell a view of the Spanish war that was not given to other English or American writers in Spain. In the months following his arrival he contemplated a fascinating picture both in Barcelona and in the whole area of Catalonia and Aragón, where he fought. It was a new image of Utopia, where workers were the owners of the land and factories, where bosses did not exist, where ordinary people organised themselves freely, obeying no orders whatsoever from the constitutional Government or the Republican Army. Orwell liked the atmosphere right away and identified himself with the workers who were fighting for equality and opposed not only the Fascists but also the bourgeois power of the Republican government. As is well known, the Socialists and Communists needed the control of the militias of the P.O.U.M. and the Anarchists, so they addressed a journalistic attack against them. They accused the militias of being 'Fascists' or 'Trotsko-Fascists,' of trying to destroy the joint efforts of various political organisations (Socialists and Communists mainly) to win the war, and that, by so doing, they were obviously supporting Franco's victory.

These accusations were made public in April 1937, precisely at the time Orwell was on leave in Barcelona from the Aragón Front, after being wounded in his throat by a bullet. In those months in the front he had understood that the militias could not win the war because they were not organised, and was thinking of joining the International Brigades in Madrid. That of course means that our writer was not blind to the surrounding reality, but was an idealist searching for the more reasonable solution. He wanted to find a way to be useful. But all of a sudden, in the first week of May, his friends of the P.O.U.M. as well as himself were persecuted by Socialists and Communists and imprisoned. Once he manages to slip out, he leaves Spain to avoid prosecution. It is a sad irony that Orwell, who had

come to Spain to defend the Republic against Fascism, is suddenly accused of collaborating with the enemy and has to suffer persecution and imprisonment. The parallelism with Don Quixote again strikes us; how can we forget that the hidalgo – once he had liberated some galley slaves, condemned by justice to hard labour in the Spanish galleons – instead of their gratitude, received stones thrown to him by the former slaves?

Well, back in England in June 1937, Orwell does not abandon his fight, as Don Quixote didn't his in similar circumstances. Orwell returns to Britain with the purpose of telling the public opinion what was *actually* happening in Spain, as he had seen it. That is why he writes *Homage to Catalonia*, a direct account of his experience, where he says that the version of the events being offered by the left-wing British press is a manipulation perpetrated by the Communists, who want to eliminate the Anarchists and other revolutionaries.

Although the book is mainly political, our author writes it from a personal position, as if he were writing a memoir, trying to avoid biased interpretations of facts and ideological prejudices. He simply narrates what he has seen. That may lead to lack of insight, to simplifications of reality – he is well aware of –, but he prefers to do so, to run that risk, rather than toe the line of a particular party or political group. We cannot forget that that had also been Orwell's position in *The Road to Wigan Pier*. In that book he had rejected orthodox Socialism, attacking the jargon of the times:

Beyond all else [...] we need intelligent propaganda. Less about 'class consciousness,' 'expropriation of the expropriators,' 'bourgeois ideology,' and 'proletarian solidarity,' not to mention the sacred sisters, thesis, antithesis, and synthesis; and more about justice, liberty, and the plight of the unemployed. (202-03)

His conviction – his naïve conviction – was that if you could put together lower and middle classes in a joint effort to fight

for liberty and justice, the division of social classes would easily disappear:

Yet I believe there is some hope that when Socialism is a living issue, a thing that large numbers of Englishmen genuinely care about, the class-difficulty may solve itself more rapidly than now seems thinkable. (*Wigan Pier* 203)

No wonder then that – after the reception of *The Road to Wigan Pier* by the British Left – his publisher Victor Gollancz rejected *Homage to Catalonia* and the most important periodicals were not willing to publish his articles on the Spanish war. *The New Statesman and Nation*, for instance, returned his essay ‘Spilling the Spanish Beans’ – where he denounced the manipulation of the press by the Communists – with the explanation that they could not publish it because the magazine’s policy was the strengthening of the Popular Fronts all over Europe, and particularly in Spain. He, however, succeeded in publishing it in *New English Weekly* in two issues in July and September 1937. His purpose in that essay, as in many letters that he wrote from Spain and from Britain to people such as Cyril Connolly, Rayner Heppenstall, Geoffrey Gorer, Jack Common, Raymond Mortimer, Stephen Spender, or Frank Jellinek, was to relate his experience, simply for the sake of truth, with no plan whatsoever to weaken the position of the Left in Spain. This experience of the manipulation of the press by some political parties, which made people in Britain and the rest of Europe believe that the P.O.U.M. men and the Anarchists were really Fascists or ‘Trotsky-Fascists,’ can be found at the bottom of everything important Orwell wrote after 1937, as he confesses in his essay ‘Why I Write’ in 1946:

The Spanish war and other events in 1936-37 turned the scale and thereafter I knew where I stood. Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, *against* totalitarianism and *for* democratic Socialism, as I understand it. It

seems to me nonsense, in a period like our own, to think that one can avoid writing of such subjects. (*Collected Essays* 1: 5)

This is a well known truth, as well as that his most famous works, *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, were written with the images of that terrible Spanish experience constantly present in his memory.

But curiously enough again, although he suffered all those persecutions, both in Spain and Britain, his feelings about the Spanish war were not bitter. In some of the letters mentioned he wrote: 'What I saw in Spain did not make me cynical but it does make me think that the future is pretty grim. [...] I still think one must fight for Socialism and against Fascism [...]' (*Collected Essays* 1: 280), or 'I have seen wonderful things & at last really believe in Socialism, which I never did before' (*Collected Essays* 1: 269).

The reasons for these optimistic statements must be sought in his idealism, in the feelings of comradeship and real human decency he encountered in Spain. Although he says he believes in Socialism, we understand that he does not mean a particular political movement. This is not a confession of direct involvement with politics, but rather the expression of an ideal of equality, that implies the disappearance of social classes, as he had written in *The Road to Wigan Pier*. This book reveals his non-specific engagement with a particular political party. He defines Socialism in *Wigan Pier* as that ideal of equality for which he had been fighting since the time he was a boy at school, where he suffered discrimination because his parents were poorer than the other children's, as he will tell later on in his essay 'Such, Such Were the Joys.' He continues that struggle for equality in Burma, but to no avail, as we know pretty well. When he arrives in Barcelona, however, his first feeling is one of equality and of sharing tribulations with his fellow men. The opening episode of *Homage to Catalonia* has already been cited. Let me also add a passage from a review he wrote of *Red Spanish Book*, by Mary Low and Juan Brea:

By a series of intimate day-to-day pictures (generally small things: a boot-black refusing a tip, a notice in the brothels saying, 'Please treat the women as comrades') it shows you what human beings are like when they are trying to behave as human beings and not as cogs in the capitalist machine. No one who was in Spain during the months when people still believed in the revolution will ever forget that strange and moving experience. It has left something behind that no dictatorship, not even Franco's, will be able to efface. (*Collected Essays* 1: 287)

This explains the spirit with which Orwell faces the defeat in the war; it is a sort of cathartic experience, since although Fascists have won, he believes that the human achievements of the revolution cannot be easily forgotten, not even by repression.

Another shocking feature of *Homage to Catalonia* and the Spanish essays in connection with his idealism is perhaps the effort that Orwell makes to be as faithful as possible to the reality he has seen. We can easily imagine that another writer on a similar occasion would have hidden information that might have made harm to his cause, and would have also exaggerated the positive achievements of the side he was praising. But not Orwell; his idealism is such that he does not hide the defects on his own side, and freely denounces what he thinks unfair. In 'Notes on the Spanish Militias,' unpublished during his lifetime and probably written in 1939, he wrote:

When I first reached the front it was taken for granted that officer-prisoners taken by us must be shot, and the Fascists were said to shoot all prisoners – a lie, no doubt, but the significant thing was that people believed it. As late as March 1937 I heard credibly of an officer-prisoner taken by us being shot – again the significant thing is that no one seemed to think this wrong. (*Collected Essays* 1: 327)

This description of utter cruelty with prisoners will reappear under other words in the pages of chapter 3 of Goldstein's book in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that Winston Smith reads with fear and repulsion. In that chapter, entitled 'War is Peace,'

Emmanuel Goldstein writes about the conditions of permanent war between the three superpowers. Even though he says that 'war is no longer the desperate, annihilating struggle that it was in the early decades of the twentieth century,' he immediately adds that

This is not to say that either the conduct of war, or the prevailing attitude towards it, has become less bloodthirsty or more chivalrous. On the contrary, war hysteria is continuous and universal in all countries, and such acts as raping, looting, the slaughter of children, the reduction of whole populations to slavery, and reprisals against prisoners which extend even to boiling and burying alive, are looked upon as normal, and, when they are committed by one's own side and not by the enemy, meritorious. (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* 152)

The echo seems obvious and requires no further comment. But contrary to Goldstein and to contemporary reality, Orwell is very far from such political callousness, such inhuman cruelty, and does not pay much attention to what should be politically 'appropriate' or 'convenient' in particular circumstances. His is like Don Quixote's plan: to fight all evil, even that which might weaken his cause. That attitude takes him to criticise some lines of the poem 'Spain' by W.H. Auden, notably the famous line where Auden recognised the necessity of killing enemies during war: 'The conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder.' Orwell cannot remain silent and expresses his disagreement strongly in 'Inside the Whale,' with words that are perhaps politically naive, but which are also words that reflect his humanism and feelings of fraternity:

To me, murder is something to be avoided. So it is to any ordinary person. The Hitlers and Stalins find murder necessary, but they don't advertise their callousness, and they don't speak of it as murder; it is 'liquidation,' 'elimination,' or some other soothing phrase. ('Inside the Whale' 37)

In 'Looking Back on the Spanish War' he insists on telling the whole truth, rejecting all sorts of glorification of the war that were published in the British newspapers; he cannot accept that beautiful picture of the war as a crusade, and so tells us about the misery, the starving, the coldness, the dirtiness of life in the trenches. He does not forget the atrocities and all kinds of destruction committed by both sides, and addresses his readers a message that is going to be expanded in *Animal Farm* and especially in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. 'The truth, it is felt, becomes untruth when your enemy utters it' (*Homage* 229). Not for him certainly; he tries to tell the truth wherever he is. We call that intellectual honesty, of course, and that is another feature of his idealism.

Also in that essay Orwell recollects a funny incident that tells much more than what it superficially shows. On one occasion our writer had the opportunity of shooting at a 'Fascist' who was running before his trench with both hands on his trousers. The area of the front in which Orwell fights is not particularly good 'to kill Fascists' because the enemy is very far and does not come up at an adequate distance for shooting. For this reason the opportunity is really unique, but Orwell confesses that he could not shoot: 'I had come here to shoot at "Fascists"' – he says –; 'but a man who is holding up his trousers isn't a "Fascist," he is visibly a fellow-creature, similar to yourself, and you don't feel like shooting at him' (*Homage* 231). This is evidence, then, of his idealism again. His feelings of solidarity with other human beings are beyond political credentials, no matter whether his fellow men are Republicans or rebels.

That idealism makes Orwell obviate the political reality of the times. His political commitment is basically utopian: he fights for his principles and cannot accept any accommodation of those principles to reality as it finally turns out to be. The manipulation of truth that he was able to contemplate in Spain was decisive in his rejection of direct political involvement, so

that even though he joined the ILP in 1938, a year later he leaves the party, as he cannot bear the idea of toeing the line: 'In sentiment I am definitely "left," but I believe that a writer can only remain honest if he keeps free of party labels' (*Collected Essays* 2: 23). Going by himself, like Don Quixote, alone with his spear, defying all obstacles, Orwell advocates a new Utopia, that paradoxically he can only achieve by the writing of dystopias, such as *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. As he says in 'Looking Back on the Spanish War': 'In Spain, for the first time, I saw newspaper reports which did not bear any relation to the facts, not even the relationship which is implied in an ordinary lie. [...] I saw, in fact, history being written not in terms of what happened but of what ought to have happened according to various "party lines"' (*Homage* 234). The resemblance between this description and Winston Smith's job in the Ministry of Truth is self-evident and requires no further comments.

In short, Orwell is a writer upon whom we can put the label of 'committed,' but we must add immediately that he was not committed with a particular political party, but rather committed with the fundamental values of dignity and decency of human beings. That attitude makes him free and places him within the realm of all those great idealists who pursue the idea of Utopia without much concern about the cruel realities of daily life, the changes that reality imposes upon policies and principles. Orwell seems to react against the pressures of reality in the same way as Don Quixote, when Sancho explains to him that what the hidalgo sees as giants are merely windmills. Don Quixote replies:

Calla, amigo Sancho [...], que las cosas de la guerra, más que otras, están sujetas a continua mudanza; cuanto más, que yo pienso, y es así verdad, que aquel sabio Frestón que me robó el aposento y los libros ha vuelto estos gigantes en molinos por quitarme la gloria de su vencimiento: tal es la enemistad que me tiene; mas, al cabo al cabo,

han de poder poco sus malas artes contra la bondad de mi espada.
(Cervantes 96; ch. 8)

So, in contrast with the pragmatic view of life that Sancho represents, Don Quixote remains firm in his conviction: all the things of war are subject to continuous change, and even though the wicked Frestón has turned the giants into windmills to prevent him from attaining the glory of their defeat, evil is not to prevail against the goodness of his sword. Similarly, we can regard Orwell's attitude against the power of the press and political parties – the forces that deny him the possibility of denouncing the injustice he had known in Catalonia – as a useless struggle from a practical point of view. The writer seems indeed to be fighting other windmills, with the knowledge that he cannot change the situation, but with the inner conviction – like Don Quixote's – that his principles are right and that ultimately his pen is to prevail over lies and political manipulation. That is Orwell's agenda on his road to Utopia; the unattainable Utopia makes him write *Homage to Catalonia*, *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, all dystopian views of revolution, all defeated expectations. But the final message we can keep with us is one of cathartic feeling and inner satisfaction, that feeling of purification of the idealist who knows that his personal duty with humanity has been fulfilled. Fortunately, that lesson of idealism and Utopianism did not die with Orwell, fifty years ago, but has stayed with us during this past half-century, and will hopefully remain so in the future.

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A Revolutionary in Love with the 1900s: Orwell in Defence of 'Old England'

George Orwell was a writer, a Socialist and a patriot. How could he combine being a Socialist *and* a patriot in pre-Second World War England? What did 'being a patriot' mean for Orwell personally? Does normally being a patriot in a traditional and still rather old-fashioned country such as England not exclude one from being a Socialist as well? Or, the other way round, does being a Socialist with revolutionary ideas not debar one from admitting sentimental feelings for a pre-1914 England? George Orwell managed to combine these two attitudes in a unique way. Even though, until his death, he thought that England's sole hope for the future lay in a more active participation of the 'masses' in political life, he still revelled in old-fangled notions of England as the 'green and pleasant land.' In his essay 'Why I Write' of 1946 he famously wrote that 'I am not able, and do not want, completely to abandon the world-view that I acquired in childhood' (*Collected Essays* 1: 6). In this paper, I want to try and trace Orwell's sentiments about 'how England used to be' and consequently attempt to formulate his 'defence of old England.' In order to do so, I will take a closer look at essays such as 'My Country Right or Left,' *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 'As I Please,' 'Notes on Nationalism,' 'Such, Such Were the Joys,' *The English People* and some of his London Letters to *Partisan Review*, as well as his novel *Coming Up For Air*.

Orwell himself was perfectly aware that for him as a Socialist 'all sentiment with the past carries with it a vague sense of heresy' (*Wigan Pier* 187). Nevertheless, he stuck to his faith in 'old England' (even though he also saw the shortcomings of it

and did not shy from pointing them out) and he clung to old-fashioned notions of 'Englishness' even though they must have gone against his Socialist grain and must have brought him derision from 'comrades' all over the world. Until his death he kept worrying about the future of 'England, his England'. George Orwell was not only a patriot, he was an *English* patriot. Not Scottish, not Welsh, not even British. *English*. Born in 1903 he grew up in a, as he termed it, 'lower upper middle class' family in Edwardian England. His boyhood was infiltrated by Victorian and Edwardian notions of behaviour and manners and his education was typical for a young boy of his class. At the age of eight he was sent to an élite preparatory school and from there went on to Eton. This upbringing and Orwell's later life, not only as a down and out in Paris and London but as a Socialist writer in general, obviously stand in stark contrast to each other and something will have to be said about his attempts to carve out his own individual identity different from his educational and class background later on. However, it cannot be denied that his childhood *did* mould and influence him and that is particularly clear in his attitude towards England. J. R. Hammond describes Orwell as a

quintessentially *English* writer. This was a man who loved coal fires and English cooking, Victorian furniture and high tea, a man who delighted in the novels of Dickens, Wells and Gissing, who loved the countryside and the open air and appreciated the quirkiness of such institutions as the monarchy, public schools and the Church of England. He had an acute understanding of the character of English life; he understood its tolerance, its dislike of abstract theories, its insistence on fair play and its penchant for 'muddling through.' (27)

And, surely, no other than a very patriotic English writer could have produced essays in defence of English cooking and on the preparation of the perfect cup of tea.

Before I come to Orwell's own particular brand of 'Englishness,' though, I first of all want to dwell a little on the difference between 'patriotism' and 'nationalism.' In *The Rise of*

English Nationalism. A Cultural History 1740-1830 Gerald Newman compares 'patriotism' and 'nationalism' by saying that

Patriotism [...] is an old and familiar phenomenon, while nationalism [...] is something much more complex and much more attached to ideals of internal solidarity under an egalitarian moral discipline. Patriotism focuses outward, while nationalism takes *all the nation's affairs*, internal as well as external, into its compass. Nationalism is thus considered a *modern* phenomenon, something of recent historical growth [...]. (53)

How did Orwell himself feel about questions of patriotism and nationalism? They certainly were questions foremost in his mind, especially with new and frightening forms of 'nationalism' mushrooming all over Europe. Right from the beginning, Orwell was well aware of the danger of 'nationalism' and tried to counter it by appealing to his fellow countrymen's 'patriotism.' He was upset by the behaviour of the so-called 'intelligentsia' who pretended not to care about England, claiming that 'With the intelligentsia, a derisive and mildly hostile attitude towards Britain is more or less compulsory' (*Collected Essays* 3: 375) His own stance on patriotism, as voiced in his essay 'Notes on Nationalism,' makes his own attitude to England perfectly clear: 'By "patriotism" I mean devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force upon other people' (*Collected Essays* 3: 362). For him, 'nationalism is power hunger tempered by self-deception' (*Collected Essays* 3: 363) and a 'nationalist is one who thinks solely or mainly in terms of competitive prestige' (*Collected Essays* 3: 363). Right at the beginning of his essay *The Lion and the Unicorn* Orwell states the importance of patriotism as a 'positive force.' He explains that 'One cannot see the modern world as it is unless one recognizes the overwhelming strength of patriotism, national loyalty. [...] as a *positive* force there is nothing to set beside it' (9). In this context John Rossi writes about 'the service that Orwell

rendered to the concept of patriotism. In the 1940s he almost single-handedly rescued the word from the intellectual dust heap and special preserve of the far Right and made it respectable again' (95).

Here it has to be seen that Orwell's 'patriotism' only really surfaced in the pre-Second World War days. His experiences in the Spanish Civil War had turned him into a very convinced Socialist and pacifist; so convinced a pacifist actually that he even thought all Socialists should refuse participation in any future war. But with the Fascist danger from Germany looming large and war to defend England from it seeming inevitable, he soon changed track and turned patriot, pondering that

It is all very well to be 'advanced' and 'enlightened,' to snigger at Colonel Blimp and proclaim your emancipation from all traditional loyalties, but a time comes when the sand of the desert is sodden red and what have I done for thee, England, my England?'. (*Collected Essays* 1: 535)

William T. Ross writes about Orwell's new direction that

his new-found patriotism was completely counter to the internationalist assumptions of his socialist pacifism and, of course, his certainty that he would not engage in sabotage went completely against his thoughts and actions of a mere five months previously. Indeed, when push came to shove, as he recognized himself, the internationalist was overwhelmed by his class background. (60)

With this he obviously refers to Orwell's own admission in his much quoted essay 'My Country Right or Left,' where he states that 'What I knew in my dream that night was that the long drilling in patriotism which the middle classes go through had done its work, and that once England was in a serious jam it would be impossible for me to sabotage' (*Collected Essays* 1: 539). Personally, I am not too convinced that this sudden patriotic turn had just to do with class. After all, patriotism is not a prerogative of the middle or upper classes, is it? Something will

have to be said about Orwell's class struggle at a later point. For the time being it is important to notice that the war brought out the patriotic side of the Orwell coin and that, for the next few years, he concentrated on writing not necessarily propaganda, but at least, as Ross terms it, 'anti-totalitarian, nationalistic, populist and leftist' essays (61), such as, for example, the above quoted 'My Country Left or Right' or *The Lion and the Unicorn*.

Despite his patriotism and his obvious nostalgia for an old England that was on the brink of extinction, Orwell was critical enough to point out shortcomings not only in England, but also in the English national character. Critics say that, due to the fact that he not only often lived abroad but also travelled widely within England, he was distanced enough to take a critical standpoint and not just see his native land in a slightly pink and over-romantic tinge.

One of his criticisms, for example, was that the English never tried hard enough to attract foreign visitors; his opinion is that 'England is a country that *ought* to be able to attract tourists. It has much beautiful scenery, an equable climate, innumerable attractive villages and medieval churches' (*Collected Essays* 3: 208) and so on and so forth. However, he quite humorously points his finger at two national weaknesses that might deter tourists: 'the gloom of our Sundays and the difficulty of buying a drink' (*Collected Essays* 3: 39). But he vigorously defends another notoriously bad feature of English life, namely English food, claiming that English *cuisine* consists of 'food-stuffs of excellent natural taste' (*Collected Essays* 3: 209) and giving a list of genuinely English dishes ranging from Yorkshire pudding and Devonshire cream to crumpets, Christmas pudding and short bread, bread-sauce, Stilton and Wensleydale cheese that, quite frankly, makes my mouth water.

Orwell's strongest criticism of England, however, is the sense of inertia he so often feels among the populace. Even though he himself looks back to the good old days with a rather obvious nostalgia, he is worried that the bulk of the population

does not seem to change at all. This worry becomes quite apparent in a letter to Herbert Read of 1939. In it, Orwell warns that

If we don't make preparations we may find ourselves silenced and absolutely helpless when either war or the pre-war fascising processes begin. It is difficult to get people to see the danger of this, because *most English people are constitutionally incapable of believing that anything will ever change* [my emphasis]. (*Collected Essays* 1: 378)

He shows the same concern in the closing paragraphs of *Homage to Catalonia* when he ponders that

Down here it was still the England I had known in my childhood: the railway-cuttings smothered in wild flowers, the deep meadows where the great shining horses browse and meditate, the slow-moving streams bordered by willows, the green bosoms of the elms, the larkspurs in the cottage gardens; and then the huge peaceful wilderness of outer London, the barges on the miry river, the familiar streets, the posters telling of cricket matches and Royal weddings, the men in bowler hats, the pigeons in Trafalgar Square, the red buses, the blue policemen – all sleeping the deep, deep sleep of England, from which I sometimes fear that we shall never wake till we are jerked out of it by the roar of bombs. (187)

In this paragraph both his nostalgia and his criticism of England become more than apparent. Even though he enjoys the 'sleepiness' of the countryside, it is the 'sleepiness' of the populace that he harshly reprimands. One can almost hear the Socialist in him shouting 'Arise and unite, people of England and do something for your country!' It is one of the major contradictions in Orwell's work that, on the one hand, he clamours for the good old days but, on the other, reprimands the rest of England (or so it seems) for living in the past. What he means, though, is that 'the people' in general ought to be more politically aware, ought to take a more active part in the shaping of the country's future. No matter how nostalgic he himself felt about the 'old' England of his childhood that he

could still occasionally glimpse in everyday life, he also wanted the people to take action, to take possession of a land that was, by right, theirs. Bernard Crick says that Orwell

was, indeed, a 'revolutionary patriot.' For he saw our heritage and the land itself as belonging to the common people, not to the gentry and the upper middle classes. It was their land because, as in the rhetoric of Wilkes, in the beliefs of the Chartists and in the philosophy of John Locke, they had mixed their labour with the land. (xvii)

As mentioned above Orwell's upbringing was in a large degree responsible for his nostalgia for a time gone by. Even though he rejected his social background early in his career and tried hard to renounce it by carving out a different identity for himself, he was a child of his time and of his class after all. He still, and maybe at first unconsciously, admired manners, behaviour and attitudes that his class and education had taught him to absorb and had expected him to conform to.

As a child he was privileged enough to enjoy a typical upper-middle-class education. Although he suffered in his preparatory school, there were many enjoyable experiences as well. Even though when recalling his time at St. Cyprian's he gets upset about the snobbishness of the public school system with its old-fashioned educational measures of corporal punishment and class distinctions (he himself was at St. Cyprian's at reduced fees and made to feel it), he quite fondly recalls

wonderful expeditions across the Downs to a village called Birling Gap, or to Beachy Head [...] wonderful mid-summer evenings when [...] we were not driven off to bed as usual but allowed to wander about the grounds in the long twilight, ending up with a plunge in the swimming bath at about nine o'clock [...] the joy of waking early on summer mornings and getting in an hour's undisturbed reading. (*Collected Essays* 4: 344-45)

Just like his fictional hero George Bowling in *Coming Up For Air*, Orwell's good memories of childhood and school seem to be connected with perpetual summer. It is predominantly those memories that form the stock of Orwell's nostalgia for old England. And it is precisely this he seeks in the turmoil of pre-second-world-war society: a return to the peace and quiet of the country, a return to the securities of pre-1914 society.

His upbringing also ensured that Orwell subconsciously adapted to certain notions of behaviour and manners, things done and not done which becomes apparent in much of his writing. In 'Raffles and Miss Blandish,' for example, he vigorously defends the old-fashioned notions of gentlemanly codes of behaviour against new trends of brutality and carelessness. He realises, of course, that in his contemporary world those values do not hold for much anymore, but that does not stop him from admiring them and, in a way, wanting them back: "They [Raffles et al] belong to a time when people had standards, though they happened to be foolish standards. Their key-phrase is "not done"" (*Collected Essays* 3: 216). In connection with 'Raffles and Miss Blandish' something else has to be pointed out. 'Raffles' is quite obviously written in the best British tradition; there is a gentleman robber who adheres to strict moral codes and in the end, according to notions of fair play, gallantly pays for his misdemeanours with his life. 'Miss Blandish,' on the other hand, is written in a new American tradition where blood and guts count more than moral values. For Orwell, this new American tradition must have appeared to be particularly vile and sadistic. He realised that even a democratic country such as America let loose base instincts that threatened the very democracy they sprang from in the first place.

In a way it is quite bizarre that a man who on the one hand toyed with ideas of revolution and pictured London's gutters as running with blood from popular uprising, on the other hand had a craving for gentlemanly codes of behaviour.

Surely Orwell like no other must have seen the repression in that very code of behaviour he so admired. It was not precisely that he admired the gentlemanly world as a complete outsider who only saw the positive sides of it. Having gone through a public school education that with its typical suppression tried to squeeze little boys in the typical gentlemanly submission, he had first hand experiences of the repressing power behind the system. It may have bred perfect manners, but at which cost? Nevertheless, Orwell yearned for it and this longing for a time with regulated behaviour that everybody adhered to and that consequently created a sense of perpetuity and security becomes particularly apparent in his novel *Coming Up For Air*.

Orwell's essays, his journalism and his letters are interspersed with nostalgia, notions of Englishness, a longing for the seemingly safe and stable world of his childhood. Whether he 'fabulizes' about his ideal public house 'The Moon Under Water' or writes essays in his 'As I Please' series, it becomes apparent quite quickly what he likes and what he dislikes. He dislikes modern furniture, radio and modern technology in general, cars and big city noise, tinned food – all of them inventions and innovations of the twentieth century. His likes, alternatively, include comfortable chairs by coal-fires, rambling through unspoilt countryside; things that evoke a time irrevocably gone by. Crick calls Orwell 'socially conservative' (xviii), Orwell's close friend Cyril Connolly referred to him as 'a revolutionary who was in love with the 1900s' (qtd. in Crick xviii).

When it comes to the topic of England Orwell writes with both a sense of yearning and a sense of anxiety. Yearning for the calm days of his childhood; anxiety because he feels that England is changing as he is writing, and not necessarily changing for the better. That not only the calm days of his childhood are gone, but that serene, seemingly safe pre-1914 England as well. He was anxious about where his England was heading to.

In Part One of *The Lion and The Unicorn*, 'England Your England,' Orwell makes it clear straight away that he considers England as being distinctly different from other nations:

When you come back to England from any foreign country, you have immediately the sensation of breathing a different air. Even in the first few minutes dozens of small things conspire to give you this feeling. The beer is bitterer, the coins are heavier, the grass is greener, the advertisements are more blatant. The crowds in the big towns, with their mild knobbly faces, their bad teeth and gentle manners are different from a European crowd. (10-11)

What might appear as patriotic jingoism at first glance can be, and indeed has been, confirmed by any foreign visitor to England. Orwell feels what he is writing and no love-declaration could be more tender than this description of his native land; even the 'bad teeth' sound like an endearment. Although part of Europe, England for Orwell is first and foremost England, distinct, set apart by the channel and its own culture:

Yes, there *is* something distinctive and recognizable in English civilization [...] It is somehow bound up with solid breakfasts and gloomy Sundays, smoky towns and winding roads, green fields and red pillar-boxes. It has a flavour of its own. (*The Lion and the Unicorn* 11)

When it comes to national characteristics, Orwell, patriotic though he might be, does not shy from putting his finger on the sore spot. On the negative side, he sums up his countrymen and women as neither particularly artistically inclined nor efficient; furthermore as horrified of abstract thought and fervent advocates of all kinds of hypocrisy. But, on the positive side, he stresses it as their main *forte* that 'in moments of supreme crisis the whole nation can suddenly draw together and act upon a species of instinct, really a code of conduct which is understood by almost everyone, though never formulated' (*The Lion and the Unicorn* 14). This national unity, despite differences in class

and/or political outlook, amazes Orwell again and again, as does their surprising, but, in his eyes, typically English stoicism:

I remember that during the worst moment of Dunkirk I was walking in a park with a friend, and I pointed out to him that in the behaviour of the crowds there was absolutely nothing to indicate that anything out of the ordinary was happening. [...] He said gloomily 'They'll behave like this until the bombs start dropping, and then they'll panic.' Yet they didn't panic and, as I noted at the time, they preserved the ordinary pattern of their lives to a surprising extent even amid the disorganisation caused by the bombing. As William Empson put it, 'Three fathoms down the sea is always calm.' (*Collected Essays* 3: 384)

But back to national characteristics. Apart from a love of flowers, an obsession with hobbies in general and particularly the respect for privacy, the 'home as the castle' and each other's personal liberties, it is 'the gentleness of the English civilization [that] is perhaps its most marked characteristic' in Orwell's eyes and the one characteristic one can 'notice [...] the instance you set foot on English soil' (*The Lion and the Unicorn* 17). A rather hypocritical dislike of war and anything to do with the military and the 'all-important English trait: the respect for constitutionalism and legality, the belief in "the law" as something above the State and above the individual' (*The Lion and the Unicorn*, 22) are further English national characteristics. In his 1947 essay *The English People* which many take for a less critical rewriting of *The Lion and the Unicorn*, Orwell again summarises the typical English character traits, this time mixing positive and negative traits to make a rather amiable and very human cocktail:

Almost certainly he [the foreign observer] would find the salient characteristics of the English common people to be artistic insensibility, gentleness, respect for legality, suspicion of foreigners, sentimentality about animals, hypocrisy, exaggerated class distinctions, and an obsession with sport. (8)

With this evaluation of English national characteristics Orwell proves two points: on the one hand, mainly through his criticism of their negative points, he shows that he is a shrewd and distanced enough observer; but on the other hand he also shows his own emotional bond with his native land. These positive features, he feels, will always be a part of England, no matter what other changes will come over the land. Hammond states that

Writing as one who had been brought up in a comparatively sheltered English middle-class environment and had twice, of his own volition, removed himself from it, he expressed in *The Lion and the Unicorn* his deep affection for his country and his understanding of its special attributes. It is plainly the work of a writer who cared passionately for his native land and believed with fervent intensity in the resilience and adaptability of its people. (201)

The above mentioned national characteristics appear again and again in Orwell's work. The typical English hypocritical dislike of war and anything to do with the military finds a particularly amusing expression in *Coming Up For Air*:

‘Well now! Listed for a soldier! Just think of it! A fine young fellow like that!’ It just shocked them. Listing for a soldier, in their eyes, was the exact equivalent of a girl’s going on the streets. Their attitude to the war, and to the army, was very curious. They had the good old English notions that the redcoats were the scum of the earth and anyone who joins the army will die of drink and go straight to hell, but at the same time they were good patriots, stuck Union Jacks in their windows and held it as an article of faith that the English had never been beaten in battle and never could be. (43)

It is especially the emphasis on the ‘gentle manners’ of the English that keeps reappearing in Orwell's writing, even though he has to admit in this context that those manners are no longer what they once used to be. Coming back to his essay on ‘Raffles and Miss Blandish’ it is quite obvious that it is Raffles’ code of conduct, his adherence to the gentlemanly code of behaviour,

that appeals to him. Never mind the fact that Raffles is a thief. He is a gentlemanly thief and as such, in Orwell's eyes, deserves respect.

In *The English People* he again refers to his countrymen's 'gentleness':

Our imaginary foreign observer would certainly be struck by our gentleness: by the orderly behaviour of English crowds, the lack of pushing and quarrelling, the willingness to form queues, the good temper of harassed, overworked bus conductors. The manners of the English working class are not always very graceful, but they are extremely considerate. Great care is taken in showing a stranger the way, blind people can travel across London with the certainty that they will be helped on and off every bus and across every street. (8)

In *Coming Up For Air* George Bowling ponders on his gentle father's abilities as a business man and comes to the conclusion that he quite simply was not ruthless enough to be successful: 'He was a very honest man and a very obliging man, very anxious to provide good stuff and swindle nobody, which even in those days wasn't the best way to get on in business' (47). Honesty, obligingness, gentleness, anxiety for fair treatment, quintessentially English characteristics certainly, but character traits that even in an ideal little village people started taking advantage of already. A world beginning to crumble.

Coming Up For Air, in a way, seems to give voice not only to Orwell's nostalgia for 'old England,' but also to all his misgivings about 'new England.' All his personal dislikes about the modern world find their way into the opening pages of the novel. Instead of good, high quality English food, the book's anti-hero George Bowling has to live on *Ersatzfood* and is not impressed with it:

It [some sausage] had given me the feeling that I had bitten into the modern world and discovered what it was really made of. That's the way we're going nowadays. Everything slick and streamlined, everything made out of something else. Celluloid, rubber, chromium-

steel everywhere, arc-lamps blazing all night, glass roofs over your head, radios all playing the same tune, no vegetation left, everything cemented over, mock-turtles grazing under neutral fruit trees. But when you come down to brass tacks and get your teeth into something solid, a sausage, for instance, that's what you get. Rotten fish in a rubber skin. Bombs of filth bursting inside your mouth. (24)

George Bowling's nostalgia for the world of his childhood and adolescence becomes apparent straight away and not only by reading between the lines. He defends his revelling in the past by saying that 'The past is a curious thing. It's with you all the time' (27) and openly admits that 'it was as though it was back in 1900 that I'd been breathing real air' (31), probably as opposed to the not very appealing alternative of breathing in late 1930s smog in London. To George, 1900 seems to be the real time, the one time of his life when he was truly alive. Now, just before the outbreak of the Second World War as he foresees, everything and everybody around him seems no longer really alive, just merely mechanical:

Even now, with my eyes open, so to speak, all those bloody fools hustling to and fro, and the posters and the petrol-stink and the roar of the engines, seemed to me less real than a Sunday morning in Lower Binfield thirty-eight years ago. (31)

He makes no secret of his real emotion: 'Is it gone for ever? I'm not certain. But I tell you it was a good world to live in. I belong to it. So do you' (31). And he is not afraid of his sentimentality: 'I *am* sentimental about my childhood – not my own particular childhood, but the civilisation which I grew up in and which is now, I suppose, just about at its last kick' (76). His sentimentality resurfaces all through the novel:

Christ! What's the use of saying that one oughtn't to be sentimental about 'before the war'? I *am* sentimental about it. So are you if you remember it. It's quite true that if you look back on any special period of time you tend to remember the pleasant bits [...] But it's

also true that people then had something that we haven't got now.
(109)

Remembering Lower Binfield, George sees it in some perpetual summer haze:

Before the war, and especially before the Boer War, it was summer all the year round. I'm quite aware that that's a delusion. I'm merely trying to tell you how things come back to me. If I shut my eyes and think of Lower Binfield any time before I was, say, eight, it's always in summer weather that I remember it. (37)

This is typical for George's whole attitude about the place of his childhood; he remembers it as his Garden of Eden, his Arcadia. And, after all, it doesn't rain in paradise, does it?

One thing that George particularly associates with a) his past childhood and b) the lost world of it is his once favourite pastime: fishing.

And fishing is somehow typical of that civilisation. As soon as you think of fishing you think of things that don't belong to the modern world. The very idea of sitting all day under a willow tree beside a quiet pool – and being able to find a quiet pool to sit beside – belongs to the time before the war, before the radio, before aeroplanes, before Hitler. There's a kind of peacefulness even in the names of English coarse fish. Roach, rudd, dace, bleak, barbel, bream, gudgeon, pike, chub, carp, tench. They're solid kind of names. The people who made them up hadn't heard of machine-guns, they didn't live in terror of the sack or spend their time eating aspirins, going to the pictures and wondering how to keep out of the concentration camps. Does anyone go fishing nowadays, I wonder? Anywhere within a hundred miles of London there are no fish left to catch [...] When I was a kid every pond and stream had fish in it. Now all the ponds are drained, and when the streams aren't poisoned with chemicals from factories they're full of rusty tins and motor-bike tyres. (76)

This long quote shows George's desperation about the world he lives in: nothing seems as it used to be. It is not just the people

who change, no, the very countryside seems to undergo a dramatic transformation, from tranquil idyll to rubbish-tip. The year 2000 reader may find this panic-stricken attitude hard to understand: in many places England still seems so rural and quiet, so unspoilt even nowadays. It was not precisely as if they were going to concrete over the entire country in the thirties, was it? For someone growing up in the first quarter of the century, however, the changes in everyday life must have come with lightening speed and have been very hard to adapt to.

In this context it has to be mentioned that the most important aspect of the nostalgia in *Coming Up For Air*, though, is not simply George Bowling's sentimentalism for the outward manifestations of a time gone by, but much more his longing for a feeling of *security* and *permanence* he used to have in the past and which seems irrevocably gone. He explains that 'Either you remember before the war and don't need to be told about it or you don't remember, and it's no use telling you' (77). All George can recall is that, as a young man, he was not afraid of the future, simply because he thought his life could not change. Now, with hindsight, he knows that it has changed and he is afraid what further changes the future might bring:

1913! My God! 1913! The stillness, the green water, the rushing of the weir! It'll never come again. I don't mean that 1913 will never come again. I mean the feeling inside you, the feeling of not being in a hurry and not being frightened, the feeling you've either had and don't need to be told about, or haven't had and won't ever have the chance to learn. (107)

He claims that

It was simply that they didn't think of the future as something to be terrified of [...] And yet what was it that people had in those days? A feeling of security, even when they weren't secure. More exactly, it was a feeling of continuity. All of them knew they'd got to die, and I suppose a few of them knew they were going to go bankrupt, but what they didn't know was that the order of things could change.

Whatever might happen to themselves, things would go on as they had known them. (109-10)

George envies his ancestors this security. He himself has lost one world already; the future can only be bleak in his eyes. In a few years even the things he cannot cope with now might be dated, out of use, worthless. Having been brought up in the security of the late nineteenth and very early twentieth century, when 'Vicky was at Windsor,' George cannot get out of his skin. His attitude has nothing to do with the mere anxiety about job future and financial securities – he actually feels the very ground shifting under his feet. Personally I think that he would quite gladly change situations with his parents who died before they knew that

everything they'd believed in was just so much junk. They lived at the end of an epoch, when everything was dissolving into a sort of ghastly flux, and they didn't know it. They thought it was eternity. You couldn't blame them. That was what it felt like. (112)

George claims that his old life changed the minute he enlisted for the war: 'The day I joined the army the old life was finished' (116). A young, impatient man, he did not realise that what he was so eagerly leaving and exchanging for the uncertainties of war was an entire world order. 'The war had jerked me out of my old life' (128), George claims afterwards and with this exclamation Orwell plainly picks up the general assumptions that not only the English gentleman but also, and especially, the Victorian world picture died in the trenches of Flanders. Honesty, fair play, decency, law-abiding, good behaviour and manners did not help win the war, nor did they ensure survival. It was in the trenches of Flanders that the literal scramble for survival began that, in the late thirties, is still dominating George Bowling's life.

Geoffrey Wheatcroft calls *Coming Up For Air* a 'locus classicus for Orwell's yearning over a lost England' (39). In it,

the protagonist tries to come to terms with his life, or rather with the era he lives in. Trying to come to terms with what he had – and did not fully appreciate then – in his childhood and youth means for George that he has to return to Lower Binfield. He does so in order to find a trace of his old life. But his hopes are cruelly disappointed. Nothing in his hometown is as it used to be. Nobody remembers him or even just his family's name. Not even his former sweetheart recognises him. George then has to realise that the past really is gone for good, but the realisation still makes him angry. He does not relish the new version of Lower Binfield which represents the new version of England: 'but doesn't it make you puke some times to see what they're doing to England, with their bird-baths and their plaster-gnomes, and their pixies and tin cans, where the beech woods used to be?' (229).

At the end of the novel George has to realise that his forefather's values of honesty, sincerity and decency have not only disappeared but hold no value anymore whatsoever. In a fast-living world of new inventions and scrambles to make one's living people are quite simply not concerned with those values anymore. They do not seem to realise that sticking to old-fashioned notions might actually make life somewhat easier every now and then. For them it seems quite simply a waste of time. Modernity and profitableness are the all-important factors now. The life-style of George's boyhood is, quite clearly, out. For him, still raised to believe in those values, this is a rather disheartening realisation.

The question here is does George Bowling really have to 'exorcise' his ideal England from his mind to re-start leading a, if not happy, then at least a content life? And does, through him, Orwell have to do the same? In a way *Coming Up For Air* surely must be the most personal of George Orwell's novels. George Bowling's nostalgia and sentimentality are his own. Or is it just a coincident that the novel's protagonist shares the author's Christian name? He himself would quite gladly have

escaped London and the rather uncertain future for a quieter, more stable life in the countryside. His current 'flights,' so to speak, to a rural life, either as a village shopkeeper or as resident in his Scottish island retreat are certain proof for that, as is his wish to see his son grow up to be a farmer, rather in touch with the soil than with city life. I do not think, however, that for him there was a question of 'exorcising' the past. It was rather a question of coming to terms with and accepting the values of the past against the sniggering of the modern world.

But to interpret *Coming Up for Air* as quite simply a purely nostalgic novel, as an expression of its author's yearning for a world that he, too, once knew, would leave aside the fact that Orwell, after all, was a Socialist and a revolutionary. His protagonist Bowling really is too nostalgic, too clumsy, too out of touch with the real world to represent Orwell himself. Orwell was nostalgic about the past, yes. But he also, more than anything, wanted social changes. He wanted the people of England to wake up and take political responsibility, he wanted a reshuffling of the political and class system and do away with old hierarchies. But he did not want to do so at all cost; he wanted to keep certain forms, certain values that had proved valuable in the past and wanted to apply them to the present.

For the revolutionary Orwell, the England of the 1900s seemed the ideal place to live in. He knew that world was lost; he knew he could not turn back time and, as a revolutionary, he did not want to do that anyway. The dilemma he had to face was that even though he was 'socially conservative' he desperately wanted political change. But he also knew that there was nothing wrong in preferring the sound of a bluebottle to that of a bombing plane. With *Coming Up For Air* he made a declaration of love for the lost world of his childhood. A defiant gesture at the time, to be sure. But in realising that the world of his childhood had gone and nevertheless defending its ethics and values, Orwell tried to make a stand for reconsidering

old-fashioned English notions of honesty, politeness, decency and fair play even in a fast-living and modern world.

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Orwell's Catalonia Revisited: Textual Strategies and the Eyewitness Account

Homage to Catalonia (1938) has been variously read as a historical document of the Spanish Civil War, as a truthful eyewitness account, as the story of how 'Honest George' – that is, the common, decent Englishman – got trapped into the wicked world of power politics, as a vindication of that small, radical party, the P.O.U.M., and so on. Fifty years after Orwell's death, *Homage to Catalonia* revisited can offer the visitor plenty of the old stuff while opening up to yet another rich reading and other layers of significance as long as we look at it as one of the central pieces of thirties textuality. In other words, *Homage to Catalonia* is about the fighter Eric Blair in Catalonia, but it is also very much about the writer George Orwell fighting the textual battles of the thirties.

To read a war book as text seems pertinent to me because in wars, battles are won and lost, soldiers die or survive, but history and our cultural memory of past events is fought in narrative.¹ All war narratives fight for cultural supremacy. Writers in arms leave, quite often, a legacy in words. And this is a never-ending battleground where words and worlds meet and where weapons take elusive shapes: remembrance, rhetoric, representation. In the case of the Spanish Civil War, as Valentine Cunningham has suggested in his essay 'Homage to Catalonia Revisited: Remembering and Misremembering the Spanish Civil War,' the clash of arms was – and still is – a clash

1 See Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) and Samuel Hynes's *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (1992).

of ideological interpretations in words. And it is for the reader to actively confront and appropriate the no man's land, the open boundaries, which emerge at the interface of witnessing and narrating, fact and fiction, history and literature. Interesting exploration of these issues may be found in many sources.² In the battles for narrative the telling becomes ingrained in the tale and in the specific genre of eyewitness accounts the writer has to rely not only on personal experience but also on memory. And memory has shaky foundations. Suspicions about the nature of memory come from ancient times. Greek mythology provides a good hint on the issue: *Mnemosine* was the goddess of both memory and imagination. One should bear this in mind when considering Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*, which is possibly one of the books which best epitomises all these problematic issues. As any book presented as an eyewitness account, *Homage to Catalonia* is a studied inquiry into the use of memory in the reconstruction of one's own life. In other words, as Hutton has put it, autobiography is 'an art form that draws history and memory together' (155).

But for a determined novelist and writer, as Orwell was at the time, the necessary ingredients of the autobiographical mode were embedded in a literary project. That is, his eyewitness account was put into a narrative by an aspiring professional writer, someone used to creating literary artefacts. Here is Orwell in his famous essay 'Why I Write' (1946): 'I write because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is *to get a bearing* [my italics]' (*Collected Essays* 1: 28). Forget for a moment the impact words, 'lies,' 'expose,' and focus on the self-conscious writer's initial concern: '*to get a bearing.*' A man with Orwell's political and polemical inclinations had to be

2 See, for example, Hayden White's *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (1987), Lionel Gossman's *Between History and Literature* (1990) and Robert Holton's *Jarring Witnesses: Modern Fiction and the Representation of History* (1994).

concerned, of course, with the question of how one does get a hearing. He got it, at last, with his *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, but the striving for a style that would secure him a hearing was right there from the beginning. In a sense, he got away with them all, appearing as the political writer with no formalist preoccupations, the honest chap only worried about telling the truth and nothing but the truth. His prose was famously described as being 'clear as a windowpane.' But he knew his trade and he could sound like a Russian formalist now and then: 'A novel opens up a new world not by revealing what is strange, but by revealing what is familiar.' That may sound like Viktor Shklovsky but it is old George, really. It is the Orwell who, in 'Inside the Whale,' expresses his deep admiration for modernist books like Joyce's *Ulysses* or for 'the astonishing prose' of Henry Miller's *Tropics*. The fact that the 'political' Orwell could see Miller as a literary mentor sounds like an Orwellian paradox. Their brief encounter in Paris when Orwell was on his way to Spain illustrates the enormous gap in their views concerning politics. In December, 1936, he told Henry Miller he was going to Spain 'to kill Fascists' and he lectured him on the pressing need for and the moral obligation of the intellectuals and writers to participate in the armed struggle against fascism to ensure the possibility of their continuing to exercise their professions in freedom. Miller's opinion was that this was the 'act of an idiot' and that his boy-scout attitude would not change the fatal tendencies of our civilisation. But Miller gave him a corduroy jacket adding, rather cynically, that this was his contribution to the Spanish Republic (Perlès 158-59).³

I shall argue that, beyond his political agenda, the author of *Homage to Catalonia* was a very self-conscious writer. If he has managed to become the respected and truthful-sounding

3 Alfred Perlès, Miller's secretary at the time, recounts the meeting adding that Miller would have given the same present to another fellow writer going to fight on Franco's side.

witness of some crucial events in the Spanish war this is ultimately due to the carefully planned stylistic fabric of his text. Against many odds, Orwell's version has become historically 'accurate.' That is why the historian Pierre Vilar reflecting on Orwell's book reaches what must be a disturbing conclusion for a historian. 'The image of a country (even when it is inaccurate) which is projected by a widely read eyewitness (even if his own reasons are arguable) becomes part of the history of that country' (30). But this is of course an old suspicion. The English writer John Dryden had put it in similar words some three hundred years ago: 'A falsehood once received from a famed writer becomes traditional to posterity.'

If the arresting power of the fictitious world created by Orwell in his more lasting novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* depends crucially on the real events he experienced in Catalonia, it is equally arguable that he sounds like a reliable witness in his autobiographical writings in as much as he effectively activates the art of fiction. I am not, of course, the first to suggest this. Referring to some of his apparently autobiographical essays ('A Hanging,' 'Shooting an Elephant' or 'Such, Such Were the Joys') various scholars have suggested readings along these lines.⁴ And concerning *Homage to Catalonia* I should dutifully point out that Valentine Cunningham, way back in 1986, referred to the 'I' in the book as 'that cannily constructed narrator.' If Roland Barthes uncovered Balzac's *lisibilité*, Cunningham was suggesting, precisely, a reading of *Homage to Catalonia* as 'a major example of a very demanding *lisibilité*' ('Homage to Catalonia Revisited' 514). But, of course, Orwell himself was the first to care about putting readers of *Homage to Catalonia* on this trail when he wrote, for instance, that his book on the Spanish Civil War was 'a frankly political book, but in the main it is written with a certain detachment and regard for form.' And he added:

4 See, for example, Bernard Crick's *The Penguin Essays of George Orwell* (1994), David Lodge's *The Modes of Modern Writing* (1977) and Richard Bradford's *Stylistics* (1997).

'I did try very hard in it to tell the whole truth without violating my literary instincts' (*Collected Essays* 1: 29).

Cunningham had referred to Claude Simon's exercise in re-writing Orwell's *Catalonia* in his novel *Les Georgiques* (1981) to put the issue in focus. It is a most interesting case in point to reflect on the blurred interface between history and literature, between the eyewitness and the first-person narrator. Besides, Claude Simon's intended debunking of the author of *Homage to Catalonia* in an interview with Cheal Pugh in 1984 provides a rare moment of *ekphrasis*, not between poetry and painting, but between prose and photography. I don't think I can resist the temptation of telling the whole story.

The first thing one notices in relation to *Homage to Catalonia* is the precision and exactitude with which Orwell writes his report. There are no errors in the details in his descriptions of the movements neither at the front nor in his descriptions of Barcelona, nor in his explanation of the numerous political organisations with the kaleidoscope of initial letters. The book seems to try to situate its central truth within a framework of meticulously detailed peripheral truths. It is interesting, as Cunningham has pointed out, to note in this connection how Claude Simon's scepticism about Orwell's accuracy in the opening chapter of *Homage to Catalonia* – a book Simon described as 'an idyllic description [...] little more than a comic tourist guide' – is supported by his scorn at Orwell's having been trained in a so-called 'Lenin Barracks' (Cunningham, *Spanish Front* xxviii). The author of *Les Georgiques* – a Spanish veteran himself – finds the mention of something called 'Lenin Barracks' a fanciful reference by someone writing fiction. He suggests Orwell's narrative is carefully worded so as to sound innocent enough, but he considers the book 'a work which is faked from the very first sentence ("In the Lenin Barracks in Barcelona, the day [...]")' (Cheal Pugh 9). Simon argues that it was not 'by chance' that a foreigner made for one place or another, and he criticises Orwell for failing to make his

motives explicit, for ‘carefully suppressing’ his motives to use his expression, in joining the P.O.U.M. rather than, say, the Communist P.S.U.C. (9).⁵

In the context of this polemic it seems appropriate to show the pictures (see Appendix) which I rescued from the archives of the late Agustí Centelles, the Catalan Robert Capa of the civil war. They prove, after all and just in case, that there was a Lenin Barracks in Barcelona and that there was a George Orwell, head and shoulders well above his P.O.U.M. comrades, in those barracks. It is interesting to observe these two pictures because, as I said, they read like an *ekphrastic* moment (‘In the Lenin Barracks in Barcelona, the day before I joined the militia [...]’). It is also interesting to realise that this important and revealing visual document was obtained by pure chance. Centelles had no idea he was getting a picture of George Orwell in Spain. Indeed, when we went through his negatives in the early eighties, I had to point out Orwell’s figure to make Centelles realise his camera – and only his – had actually spotted ‘Orwell in Catalonia.’ Needless to say the old man was full of wonder and delight.

Claude Simon does make a reasonable point in alerting naïve readers about the fictional potential of what is presented as autobiographical reportage. Orwell was, of course, choosing words and suppressing others from the very first line of his account. But then autobiographical narratives are the result of mixing the three semantic components of the very word ‘autobiography’: *autos* and *bios*, indeed, but also *graffé*. And any writing of history for that matter is an *opus oratorium*, a rhetorical

5 But then another English writer whose Communist orthodoxy was beyond doubt, John Cornford, had joined the same militia on arrival in Barcelona apparently by chance. That’s how Margot Heinemann, his girlfriend at the time, recalls it: ‘He joined almost on impulse the first militia which was ready to accept him which happened to be the P.O.U.M.’; see Spanish Civil War Sound Archives, ref. 9239/5, Imperial War Museum, London.

work, as Cicero had already warned us in his *De Legibus* (1.5). The implication of Claude Simon's remarks is, of course, that the Orwell of *Homage to Catalonia* is as much a fictional character as his own George Orwell in *Les Georgiques*. I rather agree with Claude Simon but, as Cunningham also noted, he was on Orwell's opposite side in the critical events of May 1937 since he was a Communist militant in the International Brigades. Given these circumstances, one feels inclined to emphasise the fact that although the narratorial voice in Orwell's book is, indeed, a literary device, that does not invalidate the essential truth of what is said there. That is why it is a good idea to look at these photos. But this visual evidence does not only reinforce our credibility of Orwell as a reliable witness. It is also loaded with echoes of the elusive but also of the ultimately indelible traces of photographs as textual documents that move back and forth in our historical perceptions.

This is especially so if we remember that the Catalan photographer Agustí Centelles went into exile taking his Leica negatives along with his personal belongings. He managed to keep those negatives with him in French camps and under Nazi occupied France, but when in the spring of 1942 he returned, in clandestinity, to Barcelona he entrusted his box of negatives to a French peasant couple in Carcassonne. Back in Barcelona Centelles devoted himself discretely to commercial photography (weddings and so forth) until August 1976, just a few months after the death of General Franco, when he travelled to the farm near Carcassonne where they had, indeed, kept his box of negatives for thirty-two years. It was, of course, the first day of the second life of Agustí Centelles, which lasted until his death in 1985. So, in a way, these photos capture and preserve traces of the past as they all do but also epitomise a kind of re-emergence of the testimony of two artists – George Orwell and Agustí Centelles – whose work was silenced by political oppression coming from opposite sides. Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* and Centelles's photos from the war in Catalonia –

both, texts from losers – bear witness to the potential of certain texts to challenge the common idea that history is simply what gets written in books by life's winners.

But let me now focus on *Homage to Catalonia*. The interesting point, as far as I am concerned, has to do with the fact that Orwell's 'documentary' is not presented to us as the result of an impartial research project nor as the impersonal narration of a series of proven and demonstrated facts and events. Quite to the contrary, the author wants to try to establish the truth only 'so far as it is possible' and does not tire of giving us warnings as to his own political stand, his contradictory analyses, his probable partiality, etc. In other words, the strength and the guarantee of his testimony lie, ultimately, in his desire to present it as an effort that takes in all the probable inconsistencies of a flesh and blood participant. Curiously enough, this is the kind of approach some scholars claim for professional historians. As Peter Burke put it in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*:

Historical narrators need to find a way of making themselves visible in their narrative, not out of self-indulgence but as a warning to the reader that they are not omniscient or impartial and that other interpretations besides theirs are possible. (239).

What Orwell manages to do in *Homage to Catalonia* is, in fact, what Golo Mann once proposed as a kind of ideal for any historian:

To swim with the stream of events and to analyze these events from the position of a later, better-informed observer, combining the two methods so as to yield a semblance of homogeneity without the narrative falling apart. (qtd. in Burke 239).

In any case, Orwell was conscious of writing both, history and his story, in order to create difficulties for the Inner-Party historians of 1984 in their job of re-writing history in orthodox Newspeak.

Orwell was, indeed, enriching the art of autobiography, a literary genre that Rousseau and Wordsworth had already reconceived as the adult's reflections on the process of his self-fashioning (Hutton 155). Where is one to classify *Homage to Catalonia* in a bookshop: history, literature, autobiography, travel writing? There would be good reasons to support any choice and the book has proved its endurance in each of these departments. But the literary term that, in my view, best befits Orwell's book is the German *Bildungsroman* – or rather a *Bildungsroman der Realpolitik*, as Jeffrey Meyers has called it (11). Meyers gave a simple, clear, explanation of what the book is all about: '*Homage* portrays not only an eyewitness account of what really happened in Spain, but also the story of a man's growth in personal and political awareness' (7). If the book manages to suggest this variety of readings and yet appeal to readers as a truthful and reliable account of the events described, this should be taken as a tribute to Orwell's literary craft and his regard for form.

I will now illustrate how these effects are created, pointing out what I call Orwell's Seven Textual Strategies in *Homage to Catalonia*, most of which can be found in the very first chapter of the book:

1. He describes vividly what he sees as an eyewitness ('I joined,' 'I saw,' 'I was,' etc.) with the sense of immediacy and straightforwardness conveyed by using simple past tenses, but this is mixed with frequent references to the time elapsed since the events took place: 'At the time I did not grasp that [...]' (8), 'This was [...] seven months ago as I write, [...] a period that has already receded into enormous distance' (2). So the reader is made aware of a narrator who speaks with first-hand knowledge but who can narrate the events with the benefit of reflection (with 'emotion recollected in tranquillity') so that the 'then and now' made explicit in the first paragraphs of the book prepare the reader for a story of character development, for the story of

a participant whose perceptions have grown from innocence to experience.

2. The central message of the book – do not believe the conventional ‘received’ version of the events as told by the Communist-liberal press – is not made explicit yet, but it is being anticipated by hints alerting the reader about the unreliability of first impressions: ‘I believed that things were as they appeared’ (3), ‘How natural it all seemed then: how remote and improbable now!’ (12).

3. The narrator is continuously the insider and the outsider. So, any emotional outburst or expression of enthusiasm showing personal involvement (the Italian militiaman, the virtues of the militia, etc.) is immediately deflated by down-to-earth references described with the clinical eye of an outsider. Enthusiasm and warmth for his new comrades has always a mocking counterpoint: they have strange habits like drinking from a porrón – ‘a bed bottle filled with urine’ (6); are inefficient – ‘mañana’ (9); eat weird things like chorizo – ‘a red sausage which tastes of soap and gives you diarrhoea’ (13), etc. The insider-outsider technique gives the flesh and blood participant the added insight and judiciousness of the observant anthropologist.

4. The narratorial voice is interrupted by the author’s direct address to the reader in the manner of eighteenth-century novels. He states his motives – ‘I am not writing a book of propaganda and I do not want to idealize the P.O.U.M. militia’ (10) – which usually come immediately after the warmest remarks about the people on his side as a way of introducing some negative aspects, so that the reader is put in a position of acceptance of what is being said as positive and of indulgence as to what is being commented as negative. The intended message

being that the P.O.U.M. people might have their little faults but they are essentially decent and idealistic.

5. The journey from political candour to awareness of political corruption is mirrored in the narrative with successive trips that gradually approach the narrator's political 'coming of age': London-Barcelona-Aragon, front-Barcelona-Aragon, front-Barcelona-London. The various 'return trips' to the same settings provide the contrasts and antitheses which are essential in the structure of the book and are instrumental in establishing an effective contrast between politics and action, or as Jeffrey Meyers has put it, in portraying 'the central tension between politics and war, reflection and action, disenchantment and idealism' (6). The very first chapter begins and ends with, as it were, the first movement of the 'fugue,' the first of the theme variations that will be developed in similar movements: it begins with the narrator joining the militia on arrival because 'at that time and in that atmosphere it seemed the only conceivable thing to do' (2), and ends with his departure to the front line on an overcrowded train that 'crawled out of Catalonia and on to the plateau of Aragon at the normal war-time speed of something under twenty kilometers an hour' (13). The slow train towards personal risk and the experience of war which closes the first chapter is echoed in the memorable closing paragraph of the book describing the train journey, now to personal safety and the familiar experience of peacefulness in 'the deep sleep of England' (187).

6. Orwell's use of realistic detail, like the description of the militia clothes (what he calls their *multiform* as opposed to uniform) to the smallest detail (6); his minutious account of the routines of the week while at the Lenin Barracks; his insistence on paying attention to the 'filth and chaos' and any other aspect of what he calls 'the by-products of revolution' (5), are all powerful strategies in building up the voice of a 'truthful'

narrator. So much accuracy in peripheral aspects of the war is expected to be matched by accuracy concerning larger, political truths.

7. The narrator's heroism is understated and so is the fighting itself, which comes in a mere fifth position in a ranking of important things in a war: 'In trench warfare five things are important: firewood, food, tobacco, candles and the enemy' (22). The implication being that we are hearing the voice of a real participant and not that of a propagandist. After life in the trenches Hemingway, Cummings, Graves and Owen, among others, had already written suitable *good-byes* and *farewells* to old big words like Honour, Dignity, King or Country. Orwell was well aware of the need to reproduce the voice of the rank and file, the no-nonsense type who has to carry on with the real job, if he was to be believed. In other words, he does not write as a propagandist but as a victim, so his testimony echoes that of the common soldiers of the first World War, which is the one that had come to ring true in the England of the 1930s, as Orwell himself put it in 'Inside the Whale.'

The P.O.U.M. people were quite lucky in having someone called Eric Blair on their side who could write as George Orwell did. Rather than Blair the fighter it was Orwell the writer who proved most useful: he got them a hearing.⁶ Orwell's testimony sounds truthful and has managed to become ingrained in our cultural memory of that war insofar as it rested, ultimately, on the carefully planned stylistic fabric of his text. Because his concern was to get a hearing he struggled self-consciously in organising his materials in order to produce certain effects. At a time when the mainstream was direct reportage or prose fiction based on real events, he understood how important it was to

6 For a detailed account of Eric Blair's 'poor' impression among his Catalan fellow militiamen see Miquel Berga's *Mil non-cents vuitanta-quatre: radiografia d'un malson* (67-75).

mould documentary on the narrative strategies of prose fiction. He did understand, to put it in Paul Ricoeur's terms, the necessary correlation that exists between the activity of narrating a story and the temporal character of human experience, which is to say that human time has to be articulated through a narrative mode. Orwell's account is what Ricoeur would call a careful 'emplotment' whereby events are placed into a meaningful sequence (or configuration) which enables the movement from an end to a beginning – a reversal of the so-called 'natural order of time' – placing actions within memory as well as within time.

Orwell's Catalan experiences and the process of turning it into a narrative in *Homage to Catalonia* has a pivotal quality in his literary output. It is crucially relevant in connection with the definition of his political posture and the ultimate meaning of his literary activity (the 'why I write' of his famous essay). It is in the area of these considerations that the '*homage*' to Catalonia seems to fit. The *homage* might be to the *topos* where the revolution was most successful, but it was, above all, a tribute to his own days in Catalonia. The days which provided Orwell with a *Bildungsroman* depicting his own personal and political development. The emergence, in fact, of a character called George Orwell (the fact that George Orwell was a pseudonym seems quite significant here) has been instrumental in turning his book into the most respected eyewitness account of that war. The book's successful standing in appealing to readers beyond the ideological battles of that distant time bears witness to Orwell's achievement as a writer. The biased vindication of a small political party, the Catalan P.O.U.M., has come to be read, against all predictions, as a memorable war narrative. I have been trying to suggest that this is so because *Homage to Catalonia* can be read now as a post-modernist text, a book of metahistory, which rings true because the narrator/participant knew his craft and, therefore, was able to activate, most effectively, the dual process of 'narrativising history and

historising narrative' which is at the very core of our perceptions about time and truth.

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George Orwell in the Lenin Barracks, Barcelona.
Photograph by Agustí Centelles.



George Orwell in the Lenin Barracks, Barcelona.
Photograph by Agustí Centelles.

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George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*: A Politically Incorrect Story

George Orwell was an English novelist, essayist, and critic who is mostly remembered today for his witty political fable *Animal Farm* (1945) and his terrifying dystopia *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), both of which examine the dangers of totalitarian rule. Many critics agree that behind the political satirist was a fiercely honest person, one who believed in justice, freedom and truth. Jeffrey Meyers, for instance, states that among Orwell's finest characteristics are 'intellectual honesty; clear and balanced judgement; and the courage to speak out against any mean or cowardly attitude, and to defend dangerous and unpopular views' (12). Orwell has also been described as 'one of the few men who have been courageous enough to seek the truth simply because they wanted to live with it' (Korg 543). His quest for truth always went together with his commitment to the freedom of thought and freedom of speech. One of his famous sentences about this issue was published in his article 'The Freedom of the Press' and leaves no doubt about his attitude: 'If liberty means anything at all it means the right to tell people what they don't want to hear' (1039). Consequently, he always tried to fight for truth and freedom, against propaganda and the distortion of reality.

And indeed he fought. In December 1936, a few months after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, he set off for Barcelona and enlisted on the Republican side. He joined the militia loyal to a small group, the P.O.U.M. (Partido Obrero Unificado Marxista), a Marxist but anti-Stalinist party. He was

seriously wounded on the Aragón front and was taken to Barcelona. By the time he recovered from the wound, Communist groups responsive to directions from Stalin's Russia dominated the Republican government, and the suppression of non-Communist political parties was under way. The P.O.U.M. was then accused of being a Fascist militia, secretly helping Franco, and it was declared illegal. Orwell and his wife had to escape into France to avoid imprisonment and possible summary execution. In Spain he saw the means and ends of both the Communists and the Fascists, their intrigue and treachery, their lies, libels and falsifications.

Orwell's terrible experience in Spain had a profound influence upon his political beliefs and his writing. From that moment onwards, he was determined to set down the truth, his truthful view, of the Spanish Civil War, and he wrote *Homage to Catalonia*. Unfortunately he experienced several problems in achieving his artistic and political objectives. This book was written from the point of view of someone who had fought against Franco's military rebellion, but at the same time it strongly criticised the Communist Party for destroying Anarchists, Trotskyists and others on the Republican side who were suspected of not toeing the Stalinist line. Therefore, Orwell encountered some obstacles in getting the book published both in Britain and Spain.

In Britain, Orwell's usual publisher, Victor Gollancz, refused to publish *Homage to Catalonia* as soon as he heard that Orwell had been associated with the P.O.U.M. and Anarchists in Spain. This publisher – who was 'part of the Communist-racket,' as Orwell himself put it (*Collected Essays* 1: 312) – did not like Orwell's attack on Stalin's Communists. Victor Gollancz, like many other people on the Left, believed that a common front against the rise of Fascism should be preserved, and therefore it was not politically correct to bring out any kind of criticism against Stalinist Russia, then a staunch ally. Similarly, the editor of *The New Statesman* refused to publish Orwell's

articles and reviews of books about the Spanish Civil War. Eventually *Homage to Catalonia* was published by Martin Secker and Warburg in 1938, and although there was no official censorship, Orwell believed that it had been 'boycotted a bit,' since he did not have as many readers as usual (*Collected Essays* 1: 366). His opinion about this was clearly expressed in his essay 'The Freedom of the Press': 'The sinister fact about literary censorship in England is that it is largely voluntary. Unpopular ideas can be silenced, and inconvenient facts kept dark, without the need for any official ban' (1037).¹ In fact, *Homage to Catalonia* was not the only book to encounter difficulties with British publishers: *Down and Out in Paris and London* was rejected by Cape and Faber; *Burmese Days* was also refused by Cape and Heinemann; then *Animal Farm* was rejected by several publishing houses because it was 'unpopular' to criticise the then allied Stalin.

In Spain literary censorship was not a voluntary strategy during Franco's regime, but a governmental system which exerted a tight control of the press before publication in order to determine what was morally or politically correct for the common good of the nation. This censorship kept the production and importation of books under strict control, and literature was asked to conform to ideology. In 1938 and 1941 new laws were passed to regulate book production with clear instructions to publishers, who should pay particular attention to three basic aspects: 'orthodoxy, morals and political rigour.'² No book could be printed or sold without permission from the

1 For a detailed description of this issue, see Miquel Berga's article 'The Publishing of George Orwell's Books: A Political Tell-Tale.'

2 For discussion of the situation of censorship in post-war Spain, see Valeriano Bozal's article 'La edición en España: notas para su historia' ('Editing in Spain: Notes for Its History') and the study by Manuel L. Abellán, *Censura y creación literaria en España, 1939-1976* (*Censorship and Literary Creation in Spain 1939-1976*), which minutely examines the draconian censorship laws and practices of Franco's regime, including many illustrative examples from a wide range of literary works.

board of censorship. For every book, the censorship office opened a file which generally contained the application form signed by the publisher or bookseller, a copy of the text (usually the galley proof of the book or the original version of the text that was to be translated) and one or several reports written by the censors. These reports included a questionnaire and a description of the book in which the readers justified their decision on whether the text should be banned, published or published with some ‘alterations.’ Here are the items of a standard questionnaire, which illustrate the censorship policy in Franco’s time:

- Does it attack religious beliefs?
- Morals?
- The Church or any of its members?
- The Regime and its institutions?
- The people who collaborate or have collaborated with it?
- Do the censored passages qualify the whole content of the work?³

It was usually an efficient system which suppressed or changed a great deal of publications that were thought to be subversive and included ‘improper’ comments about the Roman Catholic Church or Franco’s political regime.

Obviously, George Orwell, a left-wing intellectual who had been fighting on the Republican side against General Franco during the Spanish Civil War, was to encounter

3 ‘¿Ataca al dogma? ¿A la moral? ¿A la Iglesia o a sus miembros? ¿Al Régimen y a sus instituciones? ¿A Personas que colaboran o han colaborado con él? Los pasajes censurables ¿califican el contenido total de la obra?’. Most files on censorship of this period are found in the ‘Fondo de Cultura’ at the Archivo General de la Administración (Alcalá de Henares, Madrid). I should like to express my gratitude to the archive staff for their unstinting help and friendly guidance on how to find my way through the complexities of these files. The translation of the texts from these files into English is mine.

problems with the Spanish censorship office in the 1950s and 1960s. It is interesting to note, however, that *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the first book to come under the censors' close scrutiny in 1950, was not allowed to be published for moral reasons. According to the censor's report, the plot was determined by a 'sexual crime' which involved 'a series of specifically graphic descriptions,' and only after the publisher agreed to change and leave out paragraphs on some twenty pages, the ban imposed on the novel was lifted.⁴ Nevertheless, as could be expected, Orwell's difficulties with the Spanish censorship had much less to do with moral issues than with political considerations. Here I will focus my attention on the troubled publishing history of *Homage to Catalonia* in Spain and the obstacles this book faced in spreading Orwell's view of the Spanish Civil War among Spanish readers.

In 1964, twenty-five years after the end of the Spanish conflict, there was a first attempt to publish *Homage to Catalonia* in Spain. It was a publisher from Barcelona, Verrié Editor, who applied the Ministry of Information for printing between 2,500 and 3,000 copies of Orwell's war memoir in Catalan under the title *Catalunya, 1937*.⁵ The application was turned down with a resounding no. The censor's report clearly explained that the book was written by someone who had been fighting with the 'reds,' who were called 'Loyalist' in the narrative, whereas Franco's supporters were called 'Fascist.' At one point the censor admitted that Orwell's account seemed 'objective,' as far as his descriptions of life on the front and in the Republican zone were concerned; and even some positive aspects were seen in the work's critical views of the Communists: '[Orwell] makes known the dirt and indiscipline of the militia hordes as well as the disorder and the destruction of churches and the killing of priests.' However, the book could not be published because it showed what the censor called a 'hidden sympathy' for the

4 See File 3632-50, Box 9,190.

5 See File 2355-64, Box 15,171.

initial revolutionary spirit in Barcelona and, above all, because of its antipathy against – and here the censor quoted from the book – ‘Franco’s infamous dictatorship’ born out of a ‘military mutiny backed up by the aristocracy and the Church [...] an attempt, not so much to impose Fascism as to restore feudalism.’⁶

The publisher was not happy with the result and appealed against the censor’s decision, arguing, among other things, that the book was an ‘important historical document’ which did not constitute ‘an apology of that situation, but only the evocation of a personal situation and experience,’ and whose moral point lay in the clear display of the ‘insidious behaviour of the Spanish Stalinism.’ Furthermore, there was a reminder of Orwell’s authorship of a work entitled *Animal Farm*, ‘a critique of the abuse of power in a Communist society,’ which left no doubt about his political stance.⁷ After examining this well-argued request, the Spanish board of censorship sent *Homage to Catalonia* to three new readers, whose reports were quite heterogeneous. The first one did not seem to have understood, or even read, some parts of the book very well: his report began by making Orwell a member of the International Brigades and, then, it called him Communist. His final verdict was that *Homage*

6 ‘aunque sus relatos parecen objetivos por lo que se refiere a la vida en el frente y en la zona roja, de la que da a conocer la suciedad e indisciplina de las hordas milicianas y del desorden y de la destrucción de iglesias y mantanzas de curas, no deja de filtrarse a través de su prosa una simpatía oculta por el inicial movimiento revolucionario rojo con sus colectivaciones y su igualdad anarquista, y sobre todo su antipatía por la ‘infame dictadura de Franco’ nacida de ‘un motín militar apoyado por la aristocracia y la Iglesia [...] un intento, no tanto de imponer el fascismo, como de restaurar el feudalismo,’ etc. Creo que con estos antecedentes es evidente que no puede autorizarse la publicación solicitada.’

7 The importation of an Argentinian edition of *Animal Farm* was authorised in 1951; see File 5013-51, Box 9,705. In 1963 there was another positive report from the board of censorship when Editorial Vergara applied for its publication in Spain; see File 5178-63, Box 14,749.

to *Catalonia* could be published because it had some 'historiographical value' and Spain had already reached 'enough political maturity to be acquainted with versions of our history given from the other side.'⁸ However, he recommended cuts and changes in nine pages, as well as the entire fifth chapter.⁹ Among the censored passages, marked in a 1962 Penguin edition included in the file, are those which refer to the following issues: deserters from Franco's army, who 'were only anxious to escape' (19); 'the bare misery of the Fascist dug-outs' (92); the egalitarian spirit of the worker's militia (101-03); the 'open contrast of wealth and poverty' Orwell saw in Barcelona when the working class was not in control anymore (112); and the feudal landlords or the stuffy clerico-military supporters of Franco's regime (173-74). Most surprisingly, for this censor the use of the term 'Fascist' to describe Franco and his followers was not relevant. The second reader also recommended the publication of the book with similar cuts and changes, although he opted for removing several parts from Chapter V rather than the whole section and added four new cuts in Chapter VI:

- In the farms of Huesca, a P.O.U.M. and Anarchist territory, 'the people seemed satisfied. The friendliness of the peasants towards ourselves never ceased to astonish me' (77).
- The peasants, once more, despite having troops quartered upon them, 'were invariably friendly' (78).
- 'as the saying goes, night and the Jesuits always return' (79).
- 'To the Spanish people, at any rate in Catalonia and Aragón, the Church was a racket pure and simple. And possibly Christian belief was replaced to some extent by Anarchism,

8 'Tiene también algún valor historiográfico. Y repetimos que España tiene suficiente madurez política ya para conocer versiones de nuestra guerra desde el otro lado.'

9 This is the chapter that deals with the political side of the war and has been included as an appendix in later Penguin editions.

whose influence is widely spread and which undoubtedly has a religious tinge' (79).

On the other hand, this second censor suggested that the word 'Fascist' should be replaced by 'nationalist' whenever it was used to describe the national forces. Finally, the third censor advocated a ban on the novel, since all the modifications pointed out by the other two readers would 'represent a fraud in the author's testimonial context' and would give the foreign press and radio the possibility to denounce the distortions of the Spanish version of the book; and, of course, the volume could not be published without removing all those anti-Franco comments.¹⁰ Eventually the Ministry of Information followed this latter judgement and maintained the ban imposed on *Homage to Catalonia*.¹¹

Other attempts to publish Orwell's account of his experiences in Spain had a similar outcome in the 1960s.¹² Editorial Portic tried to publish a Catalan version of the book in 1967 under the title *Homenatge a Catalunya*.¹³ This time two factors spoke in favour of the publisher: on the one hand, it was a small printing of only 1,500 copies; on the other, a more

10 'No debe autorizarse con tachaduras, que representarían un fraude en el contexto testimonial del autor, y dejarían el texto resultante expuesto a constantes mentís de la prensa y radio extranjeras. Sin tachaduras tampoco cree el suscrito que deba publicarse en España tan dura diatriba contra el Régimen.'

11 Included in this File is another report, unsigned and stamped with the words 'Muy reservado' ('Very confidential'), which likewise urged that the book should be banned in Spain.

12 Some of Orwell's essays had the same problems when they included references to the Spanish Civil War. When Verrié Editor tried to publish a selection of Orwell's essays in 1965, the board of censorship decided that 'Notes on Nationalism' had to be left out; see File 3023-65, Box 16,177.

13 See File 9381-67, Box 18,570.

liberalising licensing act had been passed the year before.¹⁴ However, the censor's report, which duly acknowledges the existence of a previous file banning Orwell's war memoir, insisted that the book could only be published if many erasures were made, and that was not considered to be desirable. It should be mentioned in passing that the file contains a 1966 Penguin edition of *Homage to Catalonia* for the reader to examine. This Penguin edition originally included Orwell's essay 'Looking Back on the Spanish War,' but the essay had been cut off from the text in the file. It seems that the publisher did not want the censors to read more 'subversive' writings than was strictly necessary.

In 1968 Editorial Ariel charged again and began a new censorship battle in order to publish *Homage to Catalonia* in Spanish.¹⁵ After reading the Argentinian edition entitled *Cataluña 1937*, the censor, as some others had done before, suggested 'polishing' the book by substituting the terms 'pro-Franco' for 'Fascist,' 'government-supporters' for 'Loyalists' and 'rising' for 'revolt.'¹⁶ This reminds us of the way the pigs manipulated the language in *Animal Farm*, as when Squealer spoke of a 'readjustment,' never of a 'reduction,' to mean that all rations of food were being reduced in the farm (95). Going back to the censor's report, he also pointed out a few words and phrases that should be suppressed, such as the word 'national' in the phrase 'the Catalan national flag' (147), the adjective 'terrible' used to describe Franco's dictatorship (81), the

14 The 'Ley de Prensa e Imprenta' was enacted in March 1966 (and it was published in the 'Boletín Oficial del Estado' on March 19).

15 See File 10904-68, Box 19,476.

16 'habría que limarla de expresiones como 'Fascista' por franquista (págs. 24, 29, 32, 33, 34, 42, 44, 49, 51 a 54, 56, 59, 60, 63, 85, 86, 88, 94 a 97, 100, 101, 103 a 106, 108 a 116, 121, 126, 159, 174, 187, 189 a 192, 199 202, 210, 231); sustituir 'leales' por gubernamentales a la pág. 33, 'revuelta' por sublevación a la pág. 35.' The page numbers refer to the Argentinian edition, *Cataluña 1937*, used by the censor and included in the File.

reference to ‘the more naked and developed Fascism of Franco and Hitler’ (196), as well as several comments which presented Franco as ‘the puppet of Italy and Germany,’ somebody ‘tied to the big feudal landlords,’ ‘an anachronism’ supported only by millionaires or romantics (196-97). Furthermore, this new censor recommended including some explanatory footnotes that corrected or elucidated various inappropriate remarks:

- The first footnote explained what the censor perceived as an error when Orwell wrote that almost all military maps were in the possession of the Fascists: ‘Completely false, the military cartographic archive was in the Geographical Service of the Ministry of the War in Madrid.’¹⁷
- When Orwell described how the Fascists conquered Málaga and the Italians fell upon ‘the wretched civilian population, some of whom were pursued and machined-gunned for a hundred miles’ (54), there should also be a footnote specifying that ‘Such members of the civilian population were the popular militias who ran away in confusion.’¹⁸
- In the previously censored Chapter V, the reader did not like Orwell’s statement that ‘the Spanish people’ had risen against Franco when he tried to overthrow the lawful government (59); therefore the publisher had to explain the following: ‘It cannot be stated that it has been the Spanish ‘people’ who opposed the National Movement, but the Socialist, Communist and Anarchist workers’ organisations which practically monopolised working-class trade unionism.’¹⁹

17 ‘Completamente falso, el depósito cartográfico militar se hallaba en el Servicio Geográfico del Ministerio de la Guerra en Madrid.’

18 ‘Tales miembros de la población civil eran las milicias populares que huían a la desbandada.’

19 ‘No se puede afirmar que haya sido el ‘pueblo’ español quien se opuso al Movimiento nacional, sino las organizaciones obreras socialistas, comunistas y anarquistas que prácticamente poseían el monopolio del sindicalismo obrero.’

- In the same chapter, Orwell's opinion that Franco's coup was initially an attempt 'not so much to impose Fascism as to restore feudalism' (59), should be modulated by the following footnote: 'What the National Movement, led by Franco, attempted was to restore the national spirit, disintegrated and nearly dissolved by the Popular Front, for whom it was seditious to say "Viva España"'.²⁰
- A few lines later, when Orwell asserted that Franco's rising 'had been foreseen for a long time past' (60), another footnote had to be included: 'What was undoubtedly being expected for still a longer time was the outbreak of the revolutionary movement instigated by the Socialists, which had already shown its face clearly in October 1934'.²¹
- Then, Orwell referred to the 'appalling lies' about the atrocities that were being circulated by the pro-Fascist press (61) and the censor suggested the following footnote: 'Unfortunately they were not lies but proven facts, as it comes out of the legal proceedings of the public prosecutor's office'.²²
- Finally, the censor corrected what he thought was another inaccuracy when Orwell wrote that the shortage of tobacco on the Republican side was due to the fact that Franco held the Canaries, where all the Spanish tobacco is grown. The censor added that 'all the tobacco then produced in the Canaries was not enough to supply the people of the islands.'

20 'Lo que el Movimiento nacional, dirigido por Franco, pretendía [sic] era restaurar el sentido nacional, disgregado y casi disuelto por el Frente Popular, para el que era sedicioso decir "Viva España".'

21 'Lo que sin duda se esperaba desde hacía aún más tiempo era el estallido del movimiento revolucionario propugado por los socialistas y que ya había mostrado claramente su faz en Octubre de 1934.'

22 'Desgraciadamente no eran mentiras sino realidades comprobadas, como aparece de lo actuado por la Fiscalía de la Causa General.'

The so-called Canarian tobacco is nurtured moreover and mainly by importation.²³

In January 1969 the publisher was informed that the book could be printed if they made the above-mentioned modifications, and a list of changes, cuts and footnotes was enclosed. But Editorial Ariel had second thoughts about this publishing project and decided to print the Catalan version first, for ‘commercial reasons’ they said. Accordingly, they sent a new application in June 1969 including proofs of the Catalan translation entitled *Homenatge a Catalunya*, where they declared that they had tried to ‘smooth things over’ and had made all the changes indicated by the previous censor.²⁴ However, the censorship office did not share that encouraging view. The same censor who wrote the report in January, examined the Catalan edition and saw that only some changes had been made. Thus, he insisted that the adjective ‘Fascist’ should be replaced by ‘pro-Franco’ in many pages, and that the already famous word ‘feudalism’ should be substituted by ‘Catholic nationalism.’²⁵ But despite this favourable report, the censorship board wrote to the publisher rejecting their application.

Later in the same year Editorial Ariel asked for another review of the case, arguing that this time ‘all, absolutely all’ the censor’s suggestions had been taken into account. Apparently,

23 ‘Todo el tabaco que entonces producían las Canarias era insuficiente para abastecer a la población de las Islas. El llamado tabaco canario se nutre además y principalmente de la importación.’

24 See File 6605-69, Box 671.

25 ‘todavía se advierte el empleo del adjetivo “feixistas” en las páginas 40 a 43, 45, 50, 51, 56, 57, 60, 80, 85, 86, 90, 98, 160, 169, 170, 171, 172, 181, el adjetivo debe ser sustituido por “franquistas,” “nacionalistas,” etc., en la pág. 170 sustituir “antifeixista” por antifranquista, y “filofeixistes” por filofranquistas, igualmente en la siguiente 171 “filofeixista” por filofranquista, y “feixisme” por franquismo, corrección que igualmente deberá hacerse en las págs. 178, 202, y 208. [...] [y en la pág. 65] sustituir “feudalisme” por naciolisme catolic.’

that statement was not very accurate, because they were asked, yet again, to change or suppress the term 'Fascist' throughout the book and to correct a couple of phrases: the first one was in Lionel Trilling's 'George Orwell and the Politics of Truth' which was used as the introduction to this Catalan edition – Lionel Trilling referred to the people who had come to Spain to fight for freedom, and the word 'freedom' had to be suppressed; the second phrase was once more the reference to the Catalan national flag, in which the use of the word 'national' was not politically correct. At last, after making sure that the final corrections had been made, and although according to the censor the term 'Fascist' was not completely removed, a first printing of 3,000 copies of the Catalan edition of *Homage to Catalonia* was authorised in February 1970.²⁶ It was a much distorted version of Orwell's story. Similarly, the Spanish edition of the book, also published by Editorial Ariel in 1970, kept the corrections and changes of the Catalan version.²⁷ Both editions ironically added a subtitle: 'A Testimony About the Spanish Revolution.' The word 'testimony' is usually defined in dictionaries as an example of spoken or written statement that something is true. In this case, Orwell's testimony in Spanish and Catalan is indeed far from true.

In the introduction to the Spanish version Luis Romero commends this book for its capacity to help understand the history of the Spanish Civil War (9). He warns, however, that the reader may come across some exaggerations, generalisations

26 The technical term used to authorise the publication of this book was 'silencio administrativo,' which was the policy of doing nothing about a matter. According to the 1956 'Ley de Procedimiento Administrativo' (Act of Administrative Procedures), when an application was answered by 'silencio administrativo,' it meant that the result was negative, except with regard to requests for permission, which is the case here. The year of publication that appears in this first Catalan edition of *Homage to Catalonia* is 1969, although in fact, it was authorised and published a year later.

27 See File 7399-70, Box 474.

and factual inaccuracies, such as to mistake the Civil Guard for the Assault Guard, and the Sagrada Familia for the Cathedral in Barcelona, but none of them, he assures us, undermine Orwell's valuable testimony (11-12). What Luis Romero did not mention, of course, was the great amount of 'inaccuracies' urged by the censors, which really call into question the validity of the book. The following table shows how the publisher finally dealt with the directives issued from the censorship office in the Spanish version. Orwell's words in the left column of the table are taken from the 1989 Penguin edition. In the right column is the Spanish version published by Ariel in 1970 (the translation is mine). As mentioned above, the changes and suppressions of the Catalan version coincides with those in the Spanish text, except for a few details that are cited later.

ORWELL'S WORDS	PUBLISHER'S VERSION
'Fascist,' 'Fascism,' 'anti-Fascist,' etc. in several pages	'pro-Franco,' 'nationalism,' 'enemy,' etc. ('franquista,' 'franquismo,' 'nacionalismo,' 'anti-franquista,' 'enemigo,' etc)
'Loyalist,' referred to the Republicans (23)	'government-supporters' ('gubernamentales' 61)
'In the early days of Franco's revolt' (26)	'In the early days of the pro-Franco rising' ('En los primeros días del levantamiento franquista' 63)
When the nationalists conquered Málaga the Italians fell upon 'the wretched civilian population, some of whom were pursued and machine-gunned for a hundred miles' (45)	'the fury of the Italians had fallen [...] upon the popular militias and upon the fugitive civilian population, who during their flight were pursued and machine-gunned for a hundred miles' ('la furia de los italianos se había descargado [...] sobre las milicias populares y sobre los fugitivos de la población civil, que en su huida habían sido perseguidos y ametrallados durante más de ciento cincuenta quilómetros' 81)

'the Catalan <i>national</i> flag' (112)	'the Catalan flag' (<i>'la bandera catalana'</i> 168)
'But it did not follow that the government was not worth fighting for as against <i>the more naked and developed Fascism of Franco and Hitler</i> ' (133)	'But it did not follow that the government was not worth fighting for as against <i>Fascism</i> ' (<i>'Pero ello no significa que no valiese la pena luchar por el gobierno contra el fascismo'</i> 215)
'Franco, on the other hand, in so far as he was not merely the puppet of Italy and Germany, was tied to the big feudal landlords and stood for a stuffy clerico-military reaction. The Popular Front might be a swindle, but Franco was an anachronism. Only millionaires or romantics could want him to win' (133-34)	BLANK (215)
'But when Franco tried to overthrow a <i>mildly Left-wing</i> Government <i>the Spanish people</i> , against all expectations, had risen against him' (190)	'But when Franco tried to overthrow a <i>Popular Front</i> Government <i>the Spanish Left</i> , against all expectations, had risen against him' (<i>'Pero cuando Franco trata de derribar a un gobierno de frente popular, la izquierda española, contra toda previsión, se levantó contra él'</i> 84)
Franco's coup was initially 'an attempt not so much to impose Fascism as <i>to restore feudalism</i> ' (190)	Franco's coup was initially 'an attempt not so much to impose Fascism as <i>to restore the power of the oligarchy</i> ' (<i>'más que imponer el fascismo se proponía restaurar el poder de la oligarquía'</i> 84)
'The Government had made little or no attempt to forestall the rising, <i>which had been foreseen</i> for a long time past' (191)	'The Government had made little or no attempt to forestall the rising, <i>which some had foreseen</i> for a long time past' (<i>'El gobierno había hecho muy poco o casi nada para impedir el alzamiento, que algunos habían previsto con bastante anticipación'</i> 85)

'appalling lies about the atrocities were being circulated by the pro-Fascist press' (193)	'great exaggerations about the atrocities <i>that the Republic committed</i> were being circulated by the pro-Fascist press' (<i>'las grandes exageraciones acerca de las atrocidades que cometía la República y de las que se hacía eco la prensa profascista'</i> 87)
'Franco was trying to set up an <i>infamous</i> dictatorship' (213)	'Franco was trying to set up a dictatorship' (<i>'Franco estaba tratando de instaurar una dictadura'</i> 105)

All the same, it is something of a surprise to see a book like *Homage to Catalonia* being published during Franco's regime. One has to acknowledge the merit of the publishers in their perseverance and dedication. But, while recognising that these versions published by Ariel marked an important step towards an understanding of Orwell's feelings about the Spanish Civil War in Spain, I cannot share the enthusiasm of critics, like Josep Coll and Josep Pané, who in 1978 stated that the Catalan edition of *Homage to Catalonia* was made 'with an impeccable faithfulness and style' (132).²⁸ I should add that even the Spanish version is a little more faithful than the Catalan. Although both suffered similar changes and suppressions, the Spanish edition surprisingly managed to avoid some modifications included in the Catalan edition:

- The word 'freedom' disappeared from Lionel Trilling's introduction in the Catalan version when he referred to the reason why people had come to Spain, and one can just read that they had come to fight 'for the cause' (*per la causa* 24).

28 'la versió catalana is feta amb una fidelita i estil impecables.' These words were written by Josep Pané in his chapter on Orwell's relationship with Josep Rovira, the general commanding the 29th division in which Orwell served. A few pages later, Josep Pané admits that a passage against Franco is not included in the Catalan version (135).

However, the Spanish edition included all the words 'fighters for the cause of freedom in Spain' ('luchadores de la causa de la libertad en España' 35).

- Orwell's allusion to the old military maps in hands of the Fascists was more or less respected in Spanish, since the translator wrote that they were almost all 'in the possession of the Franco supporters' ('en poder de los franquistas' 71). But the Catalan edition complied much more with the censor's request and simply stated that the maps were not within their reach ('no eren al nostre abast' 50).
- The mistake Orwell made – according to the censor – when he said that 'all the Spanish' tobacco is grown in the Canary Islands, survived intact in the Spanish edition (152), whereas the Catalan version offered a more 'accurate' picture, since it is only 'a great part of the Spanish tobacco' ('gran part el tabac espanyol' 120).

The publication of these expurgated versions of *Homage to Catalonia* does not represent the end of the difficulties Orwell had in Spain to show his views of the Spanish Civil War. Some other writings – 'Spilling the Spanish Beans,' 'Looking Back on the Spanish War,' his review of *The Spanish Cockpit* by Franz Borkenau, and some extracts of letters with comments about Spain – were also initially asked to be suppressed from a collection of essays entitled *Los ingleses y otros ensayos* (*The English and Other Essays*) that Ediciones Destino wanted to publish in Spanish in 1972, although they were eventually authorised with some modifications in several pages.²⁹ Whereas one of the censors justified his negative report by alluding to Orwell's 'pretension of objectivity' as well as to his 'lack of insight and

29 There were also some other changes and cuts in other essays of this collection related to religious and moral issues; see File 2899-72, Box 191.

historical perspective,³⁰ another reader pointed out that Orwell was an 'international pinko' who had come 'to kill Spaniards. Naturally on the red side. And naturally, this is reflected in his essays.'³¹

Finally, the same publisher, Ediciones Destino, was determined to publish the unexpurgated Spanish version of Orwell's essays on the Spanish Civil War, and in 1978, nearly three years after Franco's death, they applied for the publication of the volume *Mi guerra civil española* (*My Spanish Civil War*).³² This time the book was authorised without any censorship problem, but the censor could not resist the temptation of writing a very negative report that condemned not so much the content as the poor literary quality of the essays. The volume is described as 'Flat, redundant, dull, partisan, without any substance. Clear evidence that they are willing to write books with materials never meant for that purpose. The buyer will throw away his money. Any anecdote from the most illiterate soldier of our war raises more interest than this scribble by the illustrious Orwell.'³³

This brief account of the censorship problems Orwell had in Spain is necessarily limited in scope, but it clearly reveals a terrible irony of fate in Orwell's literary career. He who had always fought for the freedom of the press and a truthful representation of history, suffered some decades later the harsh

30 'pese a su pretensión de objetividad, no puede ocultar sus prejuicios contra el régimen de Franco. [...] El espíritu y la mentalidad general del autor es: a) tendenciosa socialista sin ser comunista. b) Falta de visión profunda y de perspectiva histórica.'

31 'el autor, un rojillo internacional, vino a matar españoles. Naturalmente en el bando rojo. Y naturalmente, esto se refleja en sus ensayos.'

32 See File 6287-78, Box 16.

33 'Soso, redundante, aburrido, partidista, sin chicha. Clara prueba de que se busca hacer libros con materiales que nunca fueron pensados para eso. El comprador tirará su dinero. Cualquier anécdota del más iletrado soldado de nuestra guerra, tiene más interés que este garrapearo del ilustre Orwell.'

methods of the Spanish censorship, which suppressed and distorted his views on the Spanish Civil War almost beyond recognition. The ironic discrepancy between Orwell's actions and their results reminds us of the ironies of fate that characterises some of the characters in *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Orwell, of course, did not live long enough to see *Homage to Catalonia* being banned and expurgated in Spain, but if he had, he would not have been surprised. In one of those essays about Spain that the censors did not want to publish in 1972 he wrote about the falsification of history: 'I saw, in fact, history being written not in terms of what happened but of what ought to have happened according to various "party lines"' (*Collected Essays* 2: 294). That was precisely what the Spanish censorship office was doing with Orwell's version of the Spanish Civil War. As the party slogan ran in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: 'Who controls the past [...] controls the future: who controls the present controls the past' (34).

Unfortunately, it is difficult to end this essay on a note of optimism since, after all, the situation has not been righted yet. Although Spanish readers can always turn to a complete edition of *Homage to Catalonia* first published in Argentina in 1963, it is a pity that today, in May 2000, Spanish publishers have not brought themselves to issue Orwell's unexpurgated views on the Spanish Civil War. Despite the great number of editions of this book that have come out in Spain over the last thirty years,³⁴ both the Spanish and Catalan editions still maintain the distortions and mutilations established by the censorship during Franco's regime. One might understand the need for censorship in a dictatorship, but what is more difficult to accept is the fact that, after twenty-five years of democracy and freedom of speech in Spain, the true version of *Homage to Catalonia* is still

34 Ariel republished the Spanish translation in 1983 and the Catalan version was reprinted for the sixth time in 1992. Seix Barral also published another edition in Spanish in 1985. Finally, Círculo de Lectores/Galaxia Gutenberg issued editions in both languages in 1996.

not easily available. Worse still, some Spanish critics have not used the original English version of the text and have based their analysis and discussion on the distorted Spanish edition. José Gutiérrez Álvarez, for instance, in his study entitled *Orwell*, dedicates a chapter to the importance of Orwell's experiences in Spain and concludes that after all these years Orwell is now taken as a reliable source by essayists and historians (84). One wonders, however, about the reliability of comments like these, especially when this critic always quotes from the expurgated 1983 Ariel edition.³⁵

Orwell once expressed his fears that something like this might happen: 'During the Spanish Civil War I found myself feeling very strongly that a true history of this war never would or could be written' (*Collected Essays* 3: 109). His *Homage to Catalonia* may not be the true history of the Spanish Civil War, but it remains one of the most interesting and forceful accounts of this conflict, and it still awaits the publication of a reliable version in Spain. May justice be done soon.

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35 Similarly, Andrés López Accotto amply quotes from this Spanish version in his *Orwell y España (Orwell and Spain)*; he, accordingly, offers Orwell's description of how the Italians massacred 'the fugitives' of the civil population (57) and Orwell's opinion about Franco's attempt to restore 'the power of the oligarchy' (58)

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George Orwell's Exploration of Discourses of Power in *Burmese Days*

Burmese Days came out at a moment in which the British Empire was coming to an end. Miriam Gross argues that one of the darkest periods in the long history of Anglo-Burmese relations, which begun in 1752 with the first British envoy from the East India Company and ended in 1948 with the last British Governor of Burma, was precisely from 1919 to 1930 (20). In 1919 the Government of India Act was passed, according to which a system of reforms was granted to India, though Burma was left out. Finally, in 1930 a peasants' rebellion broke out against British rule. Orwell lived and worked in Burma during this critical period and his experience clearly permeates this, his first novel. In fact, we may argue that Eric Arthur Blair (1903-50) had deep roots in the British Empire. His father had been in the Opium Department in India, and he himself had been born in India. Orwell went to Burma in 1922 as assistant district superintendent in the Indian Imperial Police, where he served in a number of country stations. But in 1927, while on leave in England, he decided not to return to Burma. He finally resigned from the Imperial Police on 1 January 1928.

Published in 1934, *Burmese Days* locates itself in the final years of British control of Burma. The feeling of decay and ending is everywhere in the novel: 'This country'll never be fit to live in again. British Raj is finished if you ask me. Lost Dominion and all that. Time we cleared out of it' (27). The Empire can no longer be taken for granted, and Orwell's novel, published in a period of historical transition from a colonial to a postcolonial world, reveals itself already here as a work of

transition: 'We seem to have no *authority* over the natives nowadays, with all these dreadful Reforms, and the insolence they learn from the newspapers. In some ways they are getting almost as bad as the lower classes at home' (26). Daphne Patai argues that we may indeed discuss *Burmese Days* as a novel that tackles the subject of domination. Indeed, there are two central plot lines in the novel, U Po Kyn's ambition to become a member of the European club, and Flory's wish to marry as a means towards resolving the issue of his loneliness. Thus, this is a novel in which issues of race and gender are explored in parallel, which allows us, on the one hand, to focus on the similarities between discourses of race and gender in so far as they are all discourses of power, and on the other hand to determine the extent to which Orwell's critique of the Empire works effectively as a critique of domination.

In *Burmese Days*, Orwell presents us with a central character, John Flory, by means of whom the whole apparatus of imperial administration is going to be questioned. Orwell uses Flory partly to emphasise the corrupting effects of the colonial system both on the rulers and the ruled.¹ Colonialism is viewed by Flory as a form of exploitation and he is conscious from the beginning of 'living a lie' (48). Rather than seeing the imperial presence as a civilising force, Flory adopts an anti-Kiplinesque positioning and argues for the corrupting effects of the institution of the Empire. Furthermore, he shows an interest in Burmese culture, occasionally speaking out for it, which may be read as a rebellion against the position of the dominant white man in the colonies. However, Flory is consistently unable to break with the class that he attacks (symbolised in the club) and

1 In this idea, for example, it may be interesting to relate Orwell's work to Joseph Conrad's, in so far as he also explored the corrupting effects of imperialism on both rulers and ruled in his work. Conrad often claimed that one of the major consequences of the Empire for the English would be the *barbarisation* of the national character, that is to say, the revelation that they were not as *civilized* as they pretended to be.

this internal contradiction is partly responsible for his final destruction. Flory's views about the Empire are polarised in two characters in the novel, namely Dr. Veraswami, his native friend, and Ellis, who functions as the representative of the club and voices the dominant colonial discourse.

Veraswami is rather to be seen as a pathetic Kiplinesque figure. Whereas Flory thinks that 'the British Empire is simply a device for giving trade monopolies to the English – or rather to gangs of Jews and Scotchmen' (38), Veraswami argues that 'you have brought us law and order. The unswerving British Justice and the Pax Britannica' (40). The friendship between Flory and Veraswami is used to highlight Flory's anti-imperial views at the same time as it may be seen to illustrate Orwell's pessimistic views on the relationship between the British and the Indians in a colonial environment.² *Burmese Days*, in this respect, explores the situation of Eurasians in the colonial environment. Eurasians appear as 'complete outcasts' (127) due to their problem of taxonomy. They are seen as one of the most direct consequences of relationships between white colonisers, often males, and the native population, often female, and their situation is denounced in Orwell's novel. Furthermore, they are also exposed to some ridicule, often merely by their not-quite-correct English and Orwell shows himself to be aware of the ways in which language can be used as an instrument of domination.

For Veraswami, his relationship with Flory means prestige: 'Prestige, Mr Flory, is like a barometer. Every time you

2 A reference to E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) seems inevitable here. Indeed, Orwell's novel is in many ways a continuation of Forster's story, a decade later. Like Forster before him, Orwell explores the possibilities of friendship across racial borders. It is true that Veraswami is not comparable to Aziz in his complexity, that he is more parodical and, certainly, we do not perceive the tenderness in his portrayal that I think Forster reveals in his creation of Aziz. But Orwell is, I would argue, more negative than Forster in his outlook, and certainly his conclusion is, in this theme, unambiguously pessimistic.

are seen to enter my house the mercury rises half a degree' (47). For Flory, though, his friendship with the doctor is a way of escaping from his white reality. He uses the doctor to voice his anti-colonial feeling, those feelings that he cannot express in the club. But Flory is ultimately a white man and his relation to Veraswami is nothing but an expression of his internal contradictions. Flory is absolutely unheroic, constantly fearing being different. The great irony is that at the end of the novel Veraswami, the unconditional admirer of the Empire, loses his prestige with Flory's death, which does him no good. However, it may be argued that like the other secondary characters in *Burmese Days*, such as Ellis, Verrall, Ma Hla May or even Elizabeth, for instance, Veraswami is not a humanly complex character. These minor characters seem to me to be merely puppets in Orwell's hands, manipulated for specific purposes in the text. This may explain the writer's use of stereotypes in their portrayal, e.g. the faithful native, the sahib or even the memsahib. We may argue that, on the whole, they lack human complexity, being used primarily for the debate that dominates the novel. They reveal, I would further argue, that Orwell's interests as a writer lie more in the debate of ideas than in the creation and portrayal of characters. The secondary characters, thus, are on the whole mainly used to indirectly help in the characterisation of Flory, the central figure in the novel, and therefore it could be argued that they contribute to the construction and debate about the subject. They are also relevant, as is the case with Veraswami, in the debate about the Empire that is also at the core of the novel.

The club, on the other hand, is the core of English settlements in the colonies, particularly associated with India and the British Raj:

Beyond that was the European Club, and when one looked at the Club – a dumpy one-storey wooden building – one looked at the real centre of the town. In any town in India the European Club is the spiritual citadel, the real seat of the British power, the Nirvana for

which native officials and millionaires pine in vain. It was doubtly so in this case, for it was the proud boast of Kyauktada Club that, almost alone of Clubs in Burma, it had never admitted an Oriental of membership. (14)

Not only is the club central for its social role as a place of gathering and social intercourse, but more than that the club is the core of the Empire because of its emblematic nature. The club is a symbol where the trading company is not. And what is the club a symbol of? In *Burmese Days*, and for both the English minority and the native population, the club is explicitly a symbol of the white man's unity and distinctiveness. For the English, it is a symbol of their superiority over the coloured Indians, of white civilisation. It is the only place where natives have no access and it has thus become a sort of sanctuary of the white man. It is this superiority of the white man that results in our being told in a denouncing tone when Maxwell is killed that: 'the unforgivable had happened – a *white* man had been killed' (247-48). Valerie Meyers argues that the group formed by the white men in the novel are 'isolated people who console themselves by reinforcing their prejudices' (50). And, significantly, here Flory will be reminded of the white man's code:

the five chief beatitudes of the pukka sahib, namely:

Keeping up our prestige,
The firm hand (without the velvet glove)
We white men must hand together,
Give them an inch and they'll take an ell, and
Esprit de Corps. (197-98)

The most notorious representative of the club in the novel is, of course, Ellis: 'Ellis really did hate Orientals – hate them with a bitter, restless loathing as of something evil or unclean [...] Any hint of friendly feeling towards an Oriental seemed to him a horrible perspective' (21-22). With Veraswami, he is definitely the character that most clearly gives voice to the colonial

discourse in the novel. It is interesting to notice how, throughout the novel, the narrative voice detaches itself clearly from Ellis and his discourse, always offering the reader a critical view of him. He actively embodies what Edward Said called 'being a white man' in the colonies.³ This is why, for example, he hates the native servants for speaking proper English. It goes against the *established truths*. It is part of their *lower status* that their English should be *native* (23), and here once more we see Orwell's interest in language and most particularly his exploration of the ways in which it may be used as an instrument of domination. Ann Cline Kelly, in an article about Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, argues that 'To view the oppressed as irrational, or lacking in humanity, is a perfect excuse for treating him as a chattel slave' (854), and this is precisely what applies in the case of Ellis. The native has to repeatedly confirm his inferiority to the white man, in order for the imperial system to survive. It is Orwell's ironic views on the white man's burden, which Mrs Lackersteen voices in her own words:

in the end we shall simply *leave* India. Young men will not come out here any longer to work all their lives for insults and ingratitude. We shall just go. When the natives come to us begging us to stay, we shall say, 'No, you have had your chance, you wouldn't take it. Very well, we shall leave you to govern yourselves.' And then, what a lesson that will teach them! (30)

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- 3 Said argues that 'Yet in the end, being a White Man, for Kipling and for those whose perceptions and rhetoric he influenced, was a self-confirming business. [...] Being a White Man was therefore an idea and a reality. It involved a reasoned position towards both the white and the non-white worlds. It meant – in the colonies – speaking in a certain way, behaving according to a code of regulations, and even feeling certain things and not others. It meant specific judgements, evaluations, gestures. It was a form of authority before which nonwhites, and even whites themselves, were expected to bend. [...] Being a White Man, in short, was a very concrete manner of being-in-the-world, a way of taking hold of reality, language, and thought. It made a specific style possible' (227).

At a given point in the story, we are told that Flory 'acclimatised himself to Burma.' The sentence may be read metaphorically since it is not only physically that Flory acclimatises to the country (food, weather, jungle, etc.) but, most importantly, he adapts to Burma spiritually. He accepts the colonial system and learns to live vicariously in his readings. He never really rebels against the club, and though he makes friends with the natives, he never commits himself to their cause either. Flory seems to live the imperial experience like a drug when he affirms that 'It was a good life while one was young and need not think about the future or the past' (67). Yet, though Flory does not rebel, he is not quite like the others, and it is precisely the nature of this difference that the novel seeks out to explore. Physically, Flory's birthmark (64) marks him out as different. He is ashamed of it and tries to conceal it, a weakness that we may extend to his behaviour in general. His birthmark is symbolic of his being different from the rest of white men presented in the novel, symbolic also of his internal contradictions. Patai, in this connection, argues that

The most important truth we can know about Flory is not that he hates imperialism and is disgusted by the racist remarks of his countrymen but that his separateness is seen, both by himself and by others, as a failure to be a man. By his appreciation of Burmese culture and his occasional defense of the natives, he has broken with the posture of the dominant sahib and thus muddled the clear distinction between Englishmen and inferiorized, feminized Burmese. This is why Ellis refers to Flory as a 'nigger's Nancy Boy.' The breakdown of racial and cultural segregation implies the breakdown of that more fundamental identity established by gender.⁴ (37)

In the introduction to *Gender and Colonialism* the editors suggestively point out that in the late nineteenth-century

4 Daphne Patai's *The Orwell Mystique. A Study in Male Ideology* offers an interesting feminist approach to Orwell. She argues that Orwell presents an androcentric vision of the world in his writings.

domesticity, public-school education and imperialism were seen as mutually reinforcing (Foley et al. 5). John Tosh elaborates on this idea, making the point that the popular image of the Empire eliminated women completely (72). The colonial world is formed by the soldier, the hunter, the trader and the lone administrator, rather than the settler family or the missionary couple. The Empire, Tosh argues, becomes a 'men-only' sphere, and we can extend this idea to the view of imperialism as a 'specifically masculine assertion' (73). Tosh further argues that at the end of the nineteenth century we can detect a masculine revolt against domesticity. Then, he goes on to point out:

In trying to account for this masculine revolt against domesticity, the most obvious starting-point is the public school, for here boys were systematically starved of home comforts and indoctrinated with imperial notions [...] Parents tolerated the rougher side of public-school life precisely because they wanted their sons to be taught true manliness [...] Those who underwent the ordeal learnt to distance themselves from home, to break away from its female inmates, and to find their place in a homosocial world (and sometimes a homosexual one too). These same attributes were highly functional in the Empire, and spokesmen for the public schools often took credit for their record in producing empire-builders. (76-77)

The point is an interesting one since it draws on the relations between constructions of masculinity, which we can read in terms of discourses of the subject, and colonial constructions. This is also the idea that Patai discusses in the above-quoted passage. Thus Flory's distinctiveness is most often signalled out in terms of manly weakness in the novel.⁵

5 A reference to *A Passage to India* seems once more revealing, particularly since Forster also explores discourses of race and gender in that novel. Fielding's defense of Aziz during the trial is read by McBryde as a mark of weakness on his part. Fielding tries desperately to restore Aziz's status as male subject to rescue him from his having being reduced to a position of colonial object.

Here, his relationship with women is particularly revealing, and the novel presents him divided between two central female characters, Ma Hla May and Elizabeth. Ma Hla May is Flory's native lover, and he uses her only for sexual intercourse. Flory's relationship with Ma Hla May reveals more about Flory himself than it does about her, since we only see her really in terms of her relationship to Flory and have no access to the individual. And if Flory's relationship with Veraswami does not benefit the native at all, his relationship with Ma Hla May is also viewed very pessimistically in the novel. In spite of his *liberal* views on Burma and his critical view of the Empire, Flory is a white man, and as soon as Elizabeth arrives, he decides to get rid of Ma Hla May. Flory wants to marry, but being a white man, he never considers marrying non-white, and thus he shows himself to be caught in the very same discourse that he is so critical of. He sees Elizabeth, in contrast, as a genteel culture bearer, homemaker, civilising agent. Ironically, though, Ellis argues that 'She's come out to lay her claws into a husband, of course. As if it wasn't well known! When a girl's failed everywhere else she tries India, where every man's pining for the sight of a white woman' (112-13).

Indeed, for the portrayal of Elizabeth, Orwell relies perhaps too much on the memsahib's stereotype. Elizabeth is used in the novel mainly to satirise Flory, at least in so far as her presence is useful to highlight his internal contradictions. Elizabeth is a fair follower of the white man's code in the colonies: '[Flory] was forever praising Burmese customs and the Burmese character; he even went so far as to contrast them favourably with the English. It disquieted her. After all, natives were natives – interesting, no doubt, but finally only a 'subject' people, an inferior people with black faces' (121). It is Flory's ambiguous position towards the native question that draws Elizabeth and Flory apart. Curiously enough, Elizabeth interprets his wish to interest her in Burmese culture as a flaw: 'She was perfectly certain that that was not how white men

ought to behave [...]. She had thought him a manly man till this evening' (110). The implications seem to be that manly men do not wish to enter the domesticity of the Burmese, that they are there to dominate and rule, to be patriarchs, to bear the white man's burden, ruling, protecting and taking care of the native child. Ultimately, when Ma Hla May walks into the church pointing at Flory, it is once more his unmanliness that Elizabeth cannot bear: 'She knew only that he was dishonoured and less than a man, and that she hated him as she would have hated a leper or a lunatic' (291). In good contrast, in the hunting episode Flory's manliness is emphasised:

She loved Flory, really loved him, when he talked like this [...]. If only he would always talk about shooting, instead of about books and Art and that mucky poetry! In a sudden burst of admiration she decided that Flory was really quite a handsome man, in his way. He looked so splendidly manly [...]. And his face, lined, sunburned, like a soldier's face. (167)

Flory appears here as the embodiment of manliness, comprising the virtues of masculinity, as can be seen by his being compared to a soldier. This is the point in the novel in which Elizabeth is more convinced of her wanting to marry him, and is certainly the moment in which she most admires him. Thus discourses of race and discourses of gender interrelate in this novel. Patai states that 'Flory is destroyed by his own dishonesty, his inability to recognise and come to terms with his personal exploitation of others [...] as a man personally benefiting from male domination of women, from their continued inferiorization and economic dependency' (37). But Flory, though definitely trapped in a discourse of gender which constructs him as male, is essentially torn between the dichotomy self/other, subject/object. And it is perhaps not so much his treatment of females that is at stake here but his own identity as subject, i.e. white, Anglo-Saxon, male, and his ultimate realisation that if he rejects this position of

power/centre, he will be reduced to powerlessness/periphery, whereby he himself will enter the category woman (female)/native (child). He is thus faced with a crisis of identity that he can never resolve positively.

Flory rejects imperialism and tries to break through the racial discourse that constructs him as sahib. Yet that is presented in the novel as inseparable from a break through the gender discourse that constructs him as man/male and Flory cannot come to terms with that. Gender constructions clash here against racial constructions and the result is suicide. Flory kills himself because ultimately he cannot leave the category self/subject to enter the category other/object. He despises the Empire as a form of racial domination yet he desperately tries to vindicate his role as male and by extension his integration in a discourse of gender that also implicitly accepts domination. In so far as race and gender are both similar discourses of power, it may be argued that the novel shows Flory to be caught in the same discourse that he is critical of. What survives? The master narratives of race (Ellis and the club) and gender (the conventional marriage of Elizabeth and Macgregor) from which we start. Ultimately Orwell shows a rather pessimistic view of the capacity of the individual to resist and eventually to change master narratives of domination, dominant discourses of power.

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Misogyny and Anti-Imperialism in George Orwell's *Burmese Days*

'Romance'

When I was young and had no sense,
In far off Mandalay
I lost my heart to a Burmese girl
As lovely as the day.

Her skin was gold, her hair was jet,
Her teeth were ivory;
I said, 'For twenty silver pieces,
Maiden, sleep with me.'

She looked at me, so pure, so sad,
The loveliest thing alive,
And in her lisping, virgin voice,
Stood out for twenty-five. (George Orwell, ca. 1924)

Ten years after the publication of E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, George Orwell penned *Burmese Days*, a vituperative send-up of British imperial administration in Burma. The twin plots of Orwell's 1934 novel, one an ill-starred romance and the other a diabolical political conspiracy, share the central themes of *A Passage to India*: rape, native uprisings, and interracial friendship. But whereas Forster meditates on the spiritual and psychic entanglements of the British Raj, *Burmese Days* trivializes and devalues these concerns. Orwell jeers at the concept of a transcendent humanism with the potential to salvage Britain's imperial mission; the novel's blend of historical realism and satire illustrates how colonialism's hypocrisy contaminates all

personal relationships and political decisions. Orwell annihilates English mythologies of nationalism and individual agency, leaving in their wake a colonial outpost paralyzed by its banality.

Although Orwell mocks the gap between imperialism's noble rhetoric and its ignoble practices, the novel leaves untouched the sexual violence that pervades Empire's territories. *Burmese Days* confines its critiques to relationships between men, ignoring (and, indeed, naturalizing) the sexual tyranny that oppresses female characters. Like Orwell's little poem, 'Romance,' where the young prostitute's worldliness engenders the male speaker's cynicism, *Burmese Days* blames its sexually-victimized women characters for masculine discontent. Although Orwell's protagonist, John Flory, is driven to suicide by the banality of his life as an Indian Civil Servant, the novel's two main female characters – the Burmese prostitute, Ma Hla May, and the Englishwoman, Elizabeth Lackersteen – receive the harshest narrative punishments. In order to cast the men of the British Empire as martyrs, *Burmese Days* must position all women – English and native alike – as unredeemable whores. Orwell's project of illuminating the ideological and material violence of the British Empire fails to consider colonialism's sexual asymmetries.

The events in *Burmese Days* unfold in a small rural village called Kyauktada, where 7 white Englishmen govern 4,000 native Burmese. The English officers zealously perform the rituals intended to stabilize their power: they speak Urdu and Burmese only in the imperative form, play polo and tennis, read British newspapers and magazines, and reminisce about the past glories of the Raj. Despite their elaborate attempts to maintain physical and psychic separation from their Burmese subjects, the Anglo-Indian civil servants in Kyauktada have to acknowledge a growing population of educated, English-speaking Burmese citizens as well as the attending threat of political rebellions. Orwell jeers at the British postures of

cultural dominance that can never adequately conceal fear of disempowerment.

In denouncing the structure of British imperial authority, *Burmese Days* documents the colonial condition that Homi Bhabha calls 'ambivalence.' The boundary separating the colonizing Self from the colonized Other is never fixed or stable, claims Bhabha, and the ambivalence resulting from this instability functions as 'one of the most significant discursive and psychical strategies of discriminatory power' (66). Bhabha explains how the colonizer's assertions of absolute racial and cultural superiority only reveal the slippage in his identity:

Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and demonic repetition. Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is 'always in place,' already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated [...] as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual licence of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved. (66)

Bhabha articulates two dominant motifs of white colonial discourse: authority that is both unyielding and disordered, and racial stereotypes that must be reinforced even though they are well known. *Burmese Days* exposes these motifs in the imperial administration of Kyauktada, mocking the contradictions and vulnerabilities in the English officers' gestures of power.

The novel's most explicit site of English ambivalence is the all-white European Club of Kyauktada, whose racial exclusiveness makes it 'the spiritual citadel [...] the Nirvana for which native officials and millionaires pine in vain' (13). But the Club's actual appearance belies its symbolic value and evokes the British Empire's decline rather than its potency; the effort to create a microcosm of England yields only a veneer of civilization that cannot conceal its own decay and degeneracy.

Orwell's description of the Club furnishes a densely-packed metaphor for the emptiness of colonial identity:

Inside, the Club was a teak-walled place smelling of earth-oil, and consisting of only four rooms, one of which contained a forlorn 'library' of five hundred mildewed novels, and another an old and mangy billiard-table – this, however, seldom used, for during most of the year hordes of flying beetles came buzzing round the lamps and littered themselves over the cloth. [...] The lounge was an unhomelike room, with coconut matting on the floor, and wicker chairs and tables which were littered with shiny illustrated papers. (11)

Signs of English leisure and 'civility' – mass-produced papers, a billiards table, popular novels – are juxtaposed against teak, wicker, and cane taken from Burma. The site of English solidarity and sanctuary depends wholly on the violently-exploited natural resources of a subject nation. Perhaps the most telling word in the description is 'unhomelike': although constructed as the most authentically English space in the town, the Club's physical structure itself ironizes the idea of cultural purity or unity. The object of colonial desire (like the colonizers themselves) unwittingly confesses its conflicted claim to sovereignty.

The kind of authority exercised by people so displaced, the novel claims, can only be tyrannical and despotic. Therefore, any material work executed under the aegis of the British Empire inevitably fails to achieve its purportedly ennobling or uplifting goals. *Burmese Days* illustrates imperialism's failures through several anecdotes about administration as well as about social interaction. Unvarying conversations between John Flory and Dr. Veraswami expose the tension between imperial rhetoric and its reality: while the doctor parrots pro-English sentiments and praises England's civic organization, Flory points out that 'The British Empire is simply a device for giving trade monopolies to the English' (34). Further, the narrator's unsurprised, cynical depiction of Kyauktada's prison, hospital,

and police station reinforce the *de facto* inefficacy of imperial institutions; anecdotes about bribery, blackmail, extortion, and larceny provoke the reader's laughter rather than moral indignation. In this scene about a British officer arresting a Burmese thief, for example, Orwell lampoons the logic of imperial justice:

The suspect turned his grey face in agony towards Westfield, who looked away. The two constables seized him, twisted him round and bent him over; the Sub-inspector tore off his *longyi*, exposing his buttocks.

'Look at this, sir!' He pointed to some scars. 'He have been flogged with bamboos. He is an old offender. *Therefore* he stole the ring!'

'All right, put him in the clink,' said Westfield moodily, as he lounged away from the table with his hands in his pockets. (66)

The accumulated weight of such passages negates the possibility that English authority sustains any principles of social or economic uplift.

Despite the novel's ceaseless attacks on imperialism's hollow philosophies, however, Orwell ensures that the displaced *administrators* of those philosophies receive the reader's sympathy. The narrator argues that

you could forgive the Europeans a great deal of their bitterness. Living and working among Orientals would try the patience of a saint. [...] The life of the Anglo-Indian officials is not all jam. In comfortless camps, in sweltering offices, in gloomy dark bungalows smelling of dust and earth-oil, they earn, perhaps, the right to be a little disagreeable. (28)

For Orwell, the pukka sahib, or 'perfect gentleman,' who conforms to the codes of England's cultural supremacy faces a bondage more repressive than that of his colonized subjects. The precepts that constitute imperial power create their own vicious paralysis; the price of playing what Kipling called 'the Great Game' is individual agency. In a textual moment notable

for its lack of sarcasm and cynicism, the narrator explains the necessarily-conflicted subjective condition of an Indian Civil Servant:

In the end the secrecy of your revolt poisons you like a secret disease. Your whole life is a life of lies. Year after year you sit in Kipling-haunted little Clubs, whisky to the right of you, *Pink'un* to the left of you, listening and eagerly agreeing while Colonel Bodger develops his theory that these bloody Nationalists should be boiled in oil. [...] The time comes when you burn with hatred of your own countrymen, when you long for a native rising to drown their Empire in blood. [...] You are a creature of the despotism, a pukka sahib, tied tighter than a monk or a savage by an unbreakable system of tabus. (61)

Distinguishing between the sin and the sinner, Orwell critiques the imperialist agenda but fosters deep empathy for the individual British officials overseeing that agenda.

But this very passage also reveals that denouncements of colonialism's social and racial hegemonies can coexist with an acceptance of colonialism's violent *sexual* politics. The second-person subject of the above passage alerts us to the novel's central political inconsistency. The rhetorical strategy of the male-identified 'you' directs the reader's sympathy solely toward the men who perform the public work of the Empire; this passage (and the many others like it in the novel) entirely shuts out textual concern for women's experiences. The male Anglo-Indian's 'right to be a little disagreeable,' consequently, translates into the unquestioned privilege of misogyny.

Women characters – white, native, mixed-race – are all abject and degraded in this novel, exempt from receiving even the partial sympathy that Orwell extends to male characters. Orwell's failure to suggest that women, too, suffer from the various displacements of colonialism obviates narrative attention to the persistent devaluation of women's bodies and desires. Indeed, enfolding hatred of women into his exposé of imperialist tyranny allows Orwell to cast women as the *source* of

the banality and hypocrisy that traps the novel's men. Sexual violence slips past Orwell's critiques of masculine authority, escaping the sardonic eye that catches other ideological and material inconsistencies in the Anglo-Indian world.

The life-narratives of women in *Burmese Days* demonstrate that Orwell not only naturalizes but actively deploys misogyny to intensify his critique of imperialism. As Nancy Paxton asserts in *Writing Under the Raj*, the masculinist world of this text remains 'devoid of honor, admiration or love, a world in which rape is evacuated of its symbolic meanings' (258). In *Burmese Days*, rape becomes an unquestioned privilege and by-product of masculine colonial ambivalence, a fact of life as banal and unremarkable as the corruption in the jails and hospitals. All of the male characters, native or English, enjoy the right to rape women. The zaftig Burmese villain U Po Kyin is widely known as a rapist of young girls; Tom Lackersteen, Elizabeth's uncle, hires Burmese prostitutes whenever he is stationed away from his wife; Maxwell, the Divisional Forest Officer, carries on with a Eurasian woman named Molly Pereira; and the protagonist John Flory has had countless affairs with 'aged Jewish whores' (57), with Eurasian women, and with a 'full hundred' (179) Burmese prostitutes whose faces and names he cannot recall. The narrator of *Burmese Days* glosses over the ramifications of the male characters' unrestricted sexual access, leaving unconsidered and unchallenged an enormous network of sexual and cultural power-struggles.

The novel's two chief romances – Flory's liaison with the Burmese prostitute Ma Hla May and later, his courtship of the white Englishwoman Elizabeth Lackersteen – are truncated by this explicit narrative hatred of women. Orwell constructs the failure of both romances as evidence that all women living under colonial rule – native or white – manipulate men for social advancement. Even though English and Burmese patriarchy severely limit Ma Hla May's and Elizabeth's access to material resources, Orwell represents the female characters'

struggles for self-preservation only as morally-indefensible assaults on masculine autonomy. No larger cultural or historical perspective tempers textual contempt for Ma Hla May and Elizabeth; their sexual and economic anxieties aggravate and frustrate the already-beleaguered Anglo-Indian officer, Flory. Despite their racial differences, the indigent Burmese prostitute and the middle-class Englishwoman become very similar objects of Orwell's anti-imperialist crusade. Ma Hla May's desperate efforts to secure the monetary rewards due to a white man's mistress, as well as Elizabeth's hope that marriage will bless her with social status, affirm the narrator's view that women are 'a kind of siren whose one aim was to lure men away from polo and enmesh them in tea-fights and tennis-parties' (185). These characters eventually become the novel's most despised signifiers of colonialism's hypocrisy: the feminine pretense of love, even more than the masculine pretense of civilizing the Burmese, conceals nothing more than a desperate desire for money and social power.

Burmese Days blames Ma Hla May for her complicity with Western imperialism, never acknowledging how an imperial power structure leaves native women materially impoverished. Flory has bought Ma Hla May from her family for 300 rupees, and for two years, she comes to his house for afternoon tea, sex, and financial compensation. The narrator undercuts her assertions of love for Flory by claiming that

It was the idle concubine's life that she loved, and the visits to her village dressed in all her finery, when she could boast of her position as a 'bo-kadaw' – a white man's wife; for she had persuaded everyone, herself included, that she was Flory's wife. (46-47)

But this self-delusion arises as a consequence of imperialist misogyny; Ma Hla May's fascination with Flory's white skin and 'the sense of power it gave her' (47) demonstrates not the essential baseness of her pretensions, but the structural limitations of living as a native woman under colonial rule.

I find that Gayatri Spivak's seminal essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' provides a useful formulation of the textual and historical forces that produce Ma Hla May's character. The sexual economy of Western colonialism, Spivak argues, traps native women in a troubled cultural interstice:

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization. (102)

The cultural tension between 'tradition' (i.e., village life outside Kyauktada) and 'modernization' (i.e., the privilege of being a white man's mistress) determines Ma Hla May's initial desire for Flory as well as her later alienation from social stability.

Flory discards Ma Hla May when he begins courting Elizabeth Lackersteen, getting rid of her along with his cigarettes, gin, and slovenly clothes. She becomes a disposable, replaceable commodity, like the other Burmese women who have preceded her in Flory's bed. Ma Hla May's futile efforts to reinstate herself as Flory's mistress reduce her, literally, to the 'violent shuttling' that Spivak claims is the inevitable condition of native women under imperial rule. Ma Hla May discovers that an abandoned Burmese woman has no place either in her native social fabric or in the culture of white colonial authority:

Two years I was your wife, you loved me and cared for me, and then without warning, without reason, you drove me from your door like a dog. And I must go back to my village, with no money, with all my jewels and silk *longyi*s gone, and the people will point and say, 'There is Ma Hla May who thought herself cleverer than the rest of us. And behold! Her white man has treated her as they always do.' I am ruined, ruined! What man will marry me after I have lived two years in your house? (139)

As Ma Hla May moves desperately between her native village and Flory's house, unable to occupy any socially-stable role, she falls into what Gayatri Spivak calls 'a violent aporia between subject and object status' (102). Burmese patriarchy has denied her economic self-sufficiency; the English 'pukka sahib's code' mandates that a white officer cannot support her while wooing a white woman. Further, the narrator refuses to dignify her protests against Flory's callous treatment, assuring us that 'If she wept and grovelled it was only for the position she had once had as his mistress, the idle life, the rich clothes and dominion over servants' (141). Ma Hla May therefore takes her revenge on Flory in the only way she can: by using her liminal cultural position to humiliate him in front of his white English colleagues.

At the novel's climax, when Flory believes that he and Elizabeth Lackersteen will soon be married, Ma Hla May bursts into an English church service and shrieks out the truth about her liaison with Flory. Her power in this scene, ironically, comes from vocalizing her *lack* of power. In front of the all-white congregation, Ma Hla May wails about the poverty and social stigma that have ensued from Flory's neglect. To emphasize her abjection, she tears off her clothes and cries

Look at me, you white men, and you women, too, look at me! Look how he has ruined me! Look at these rags I am wearing! And he sitting there, the liar, the coward, pretending not to see me! He would let me starve at his gate like a pariah dog. Ah, but I will shame you! Turn around and look at me! Look at this body that you have kissed a thousand times – look – look – (250)

The spectacle of Ma Hla May's unclothed body makes public Flory's transgression of the pukka sahib's code; Orwell forces Ma Hla May to present herself as a metonym for the racial and sexual Otherness that are anathema to white imperial self-fashioning. While rape and prostitution are naturalized and otherwise unpunished in the world of this novel, being publicly

humiliated at the hands of a traditionally-abject native woman is cause enough for Flory's suicide. Deliberately posturing as a degenerate woman, Ma Hla May abases her own body in order to bring about Flory's downfall.

But this self-inflicted violence fails to restore Ma Hla May to social stability. Ma Hla May does not reap the fruits of her performances: she neither regains the privilege of being Flory's mistress nor emerges the moral victor in their battle. Following Flory's suicide, the narrator tells us, condescendingly, that

Ma Hla May is in a brothel in Mandalay. Her good looks are all but gone, and her clients pay her only four annas and sometimes kick her and beat her. Perhaps more bitterly than any of the others, she regrets the good time when Flory was alive, and when she had not the wisdom to put aside any of the money she extracted from him. (261)

The moral architecture of *Burmese Days* casts the wages of feminine greed as dehumanization and violence, and Ma Hla May's already-precarious status as a 'bo-kadaw,' or white man's wife, collapses into the silent imprisonment of a prostitute with no autonomy. Ugly, abused, regretful, and penniless, Ma Hla May's residence in the brothel renders her the powerless commodity of textually-sanctioned male desire.

The unquestioned devaluation of dark-skinned native women structures Ma Hla May's life-narrative and makes the Mandalay brothel her final destination. The cultural logic of colonial fiction should, accordingly, idealize white femininity and protect Elizabeth Lackersteen from the sexual violence inflicted on Ma Hla May. Gayatri Spivak points out that '[i]mperialism's image as the establisher of the good society is marked by the espousal of the woman as *object* of protection from her own kind' (94). But as a consequence of Orwell's insistence that imperialism *cannot* establish a 'good society,' British men in this novel are absolved of their obligation to safeguard white women. *Burmese Days* repudiates the idea, so

central to *A Passage to India*, that protecting a white woman's chastity is the hallowed duty of imperial officials. In fact, Orwell constructs Elizabeth Lackersteen as a whitewashed version of Ma Hla May, an English middle-class woman who willingly prostitutes the ideals of love and intimacy to the promise of financial prosperity. No sentimental rhetoric cloaks Elizabeth's failed relationships with John Flory and Lieutenant Verrall, or her eventual marriage to Mr. Macgregor. Orwell renders Elizabeth's ascent to wifedom with the same brutal cynicism that describes Ma Hla May's descent to whoredom.

If Ma Hla May's prostitution exists in response to the racial and cultural violence inflicted upon her country, Elizabeth Lackersteen's develops in response to her ambiguous class status. Born in Highgate to parents who briefly attain financial comfort, Elizabeth attends an elite girls' English boarding school where, to the narrator's disgust, she learns to divide the world into two categories: the lovely ('the expensive, the elegant, the aristocratic') and the beastly ('the cheap, the low, the shabby, the laborious,' 80). The sudden death of her parents casts Elizabeth out of her privileged position in English society, leaving her penniless, unmarried, and untrained for employment. As she faces total dispossession from her 'lovely' life of social exclusiveness, she receives an invitation from her aunt and uncle in Burma assuring her that she will become a 'queen in the local society' of Kyauktada (85). Like Ma Hla May, who is caught in the limbo between Flory's English household and her native Burmese village, Elizabeth Lackersteen's choices dwindle to being a culturally-marginal 'spinster' in England or prostituting herself to a man in the colonies.

Elizabeth enters Burma believing that the British Raj will supply a version of the prosperity she can no longer claim in England:

In anticipation she tasted the agreeable atmosphere of Clubs, with punkahs flapping and barefooted white-turbaned boys reverently salaaming; and maidans where bronzed Englishmen with little clipped

moustaches galloped to and fro, whacking polo balls. It was almost as nice as being really rich, the way people lived in India. (86)

As Daniel Bivona notes in *British Imperial Literature, 1870-1940*, Elizabeth's fantasy of Anglo-Indian life is 'inextricably bound up with the agreeable spectacle of those who cannot share it' (186); indeed, the elitist class hierarchies of Elizabeth's boarding school easily translate into support for imperialism's racial and cultural divisions. Elizabeth's calculated entrance into the colonial 'marriage-market' and her eager participation in the rituals of colonial society supply a rich convergence point for Orwell's various oppositions to British imperialism.

Orwell punishes Elizabeth for her mercenary desires, not only trivializing her devotion to dancing, cheap novels, and sentimental music, but more seriously, positioning her as the willing recipient of sexual assault. Even more than Ma Hla May, Elizabeth endures sexual violence at the hands of white men in Burma. Elizabeth's uncle, Tom Lackersteen, who should be a benevolent patriarch concerned for his niece's well being, repeatedly tries to rape her and sulks at her refusal to capitulate. Elizabeth's desperation for a husband intensifies as her uncle's attacks become intolerable, and she finds herself in romances that, ironically, also become sexually exploitative. She makes herself sexually available to the misogynistic Lieutenant Verrall, who dallies with her but fails to propose marriage; and she suffers Flory's kisses and embraces when she sees no other path to the altar. Her willingness to endure sexual violence elicits a different narrative reaction than the male characters' endurance of social corruption: whereas Orwell empathizes with the cultural oppressiveness thrust upon male imperialists, he represents Elizabeth's sexual victimization as evidence of and punishment for her own immorality.

The narrative insistence on Elizabeth's callousness reaches its peak when Elizabeth rejects Flory's final marriage proposal. After Ma Hla May humiliates Flory during the English church service, Elizabeth decides that 'spinsterhood, drudgery,

anything' (255) would be preferable to marrying a man who can lose face to a native woman. Orwell represents Elizabeth's repudiation of Flory as evidence of her slavish adherence to imperialism's social mandates:

She knew only that he was dishonoured and less than a man, and that she hated him as she would have hated a leper or a lunatic. The instinct was deeper than reason or even self-interest, and she could no more have disobeyed it than she could have stopped breathing. (255)

So visceral is Elizabeth's devotion to the hollow center of imperialism's rhetoric that she rejects Flory because of his failure to maintain the *image* of integrity, rather than because of his dishonorable behavior itself.

Elizabeth's eventual marriage to a well-settled Anglo-Indian official meets with tremendous narrative disdain; Orwell offers her neither moral redemption nor political liberation. After Flory's suicide, Elizabeth gladly marries Mr. Macgregor, the Deputy Commissioner of Kyauktada, and Orwell condemns the both marriage and Elizabeth's effortless adjustment to the life of an Anglo-Indian wife:

Elizabeth has grown mature surprisingly quickly, and a certain hardness of manner that always belonged to her has become accentuated. Her servants live in terror of her, though she speaks no Burmese. She has an exhaustive knowledge of the Civil List, gives charming little dinner-parties and knows how to put the wives of subordinate officials on their places – in short, she fills with complete success the position for which Nature had designed her from the first, that of a burra memsahib. (263)

The life of a 'burra memsahib,' or lady-master, reinforces imperialism's central flaws: the refusal to acknowledge geographical displacement, the entitlement to tyrannize, and the obsession with rank and hierarchy. This attack on Elizabeth forms the novel's conclusion, so that Orwell's final invectives

against Empire and its agents take the form of an anti-woman diatribe. Orwell's portrayal of imperialist dystopia, consistent to its last words, fails to acknowledge that Anglo-Indian officialdom assigns a violently limited and limiting role to women.

Burmese Days offers a bleak response to Forster's *A Passage to India*, where the accusation that Dr. Aziz has raped Adela Quested produces somber meditations on the philosophical and metaphysical elements of imperial relationships. Orwell's novel utilizes sexual despotism to unmask imperial despotism, never cognizant that female subjectivity gets obliterated when rape becomes an unremarkable, unquestioned feature of male existence. The sympathy meted out to Empire's men does not touch Empire's abject women; the feminine condition of economic dependency becomes a *cause* rather than an effect of imperial banality. The self-proclaimed textual honesty of *Burmese Days*, ultimately, unmask imperialism's flaws but disregards the structure and effects of the Empire's misogyny.

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Part II: Orwell, History and Dystopia

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ZOË FAIRBAIRNS

1984 Came and Went

It is a great honour to be invited to speak here, and I would like to thank the British Council and the University of Alcalá for their invitation to contribute to this conference on the work of George Orwell.

In calling my talk ‘1984 Came and Went,’ I am not seeking to be dismissive of Orwell, even though I must reserve my right to some professional and political disagreements with him. Rather I am quoting from my own dystopian novel *Benefits*, which was published in 1979, thirty years after the publication of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and five years before the actual date itself.¹

In my talk I want to do two things: firstly, to tell you how and why I wrote *Benefits*, and thereby to offer some insight into the work of being a writer, particularly a woman writer working in Britain in the 1970s; and secondly to tell you some of the ways in which I was influenced by the work of Orwell. This must of course include some of the ways in which I was influenced to disagree with him. In sharing much of the admiration which many people feel for this important writer, I nevertheless cannot quite forgive or forget one of the things he wrote in *The Road to Wigan Pier*. Expressing his contempt for some of his comrades in the Socialist movement, he wrote this: ‘One sometimes gets the impression that the mere words

1 *Benefits* took two years to write. It was published in 1979 by a feminist publishing company, Virago, who kept it in print for about eighteen years. It went out of print about two years ago and was republished in 1998 by Five Leaves Publications, a small radical press in Nottingham, PO Box 81, Nottingham NG5 4ER, England. fiveleaf01@surfaid.org ISBN 0-907123-67-8.

“Socialism” and “Communism” draw towards them with magnetic force every fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, “Nature Cure” quack, pacifist, and’ wait for it, this is the worst of all! ‘feminist in England.’ He refers to this as the ‘the horrible – the really disquieting – prevalence of cranks wherever Socialists are gathered together’ (173-74; ch. 11).

Friends, I stand before you unapologetic with my fruit juice. I am a not actually wearing sandals at the moment, but I do have a pair back in my hotel. I am a feminist, but I do not think that I am a crank, any more than the fact that I sometimes use natural remedies for ailments makes me a nature cure quack. I am neither a Quaker nor a pacifist, but I have been close to both these movements. The people Orwell attacks sound very much like me and my friends. Wouldn’t it be nice if the social prejudice Orwell expresses in these passages had come and gone along with the year 1984?

Let me tell you first how and why I wrote *Benefits*. The idea first came to me in the year 1976. People often ask writers who our influences are, and often the only honest answer is, ‘I don’t know.’ This is something that we frequently leave to the readers and the people who study our work, whose conclusions we then read with absolute fascination, finding out all sorts of things that we did not know before about what we intended and who influenced us. It is a sort of after-the-event consideration; you look back on the process and find out who or what your influences were rather than being conscious of them at the time.

‘Influences’ are not always other writers. One of the most important influences on the initial development of *Benefits* was the weather. You may have heard that English people love to talk about weather, that it is a national obsession. Some of us like to write about it as well. The summer of 1976 was exceptionally hot in the south of England. We had four months of hot, hot weather without any rain. I realise that this may not sound terribly remarkable to people who live in some parts of

Spain, but in the context of England this was pretty unusual. At first we just loved it because it meant that we could do at home all the things that we were in the habit of paying money to come to Spain to do: we could wear sandals, we could eat our meals outside, we could go swimming after work, we could wear shorts, we could relax, we could sleep at night without blankets, and we really liked that. But as time went on it became a bit sinister and frightening. We thought: 'what if never rains again?' Rivers were drying up and farmers were losing their crops. In our anxiety, we looked around for someone to blame, and chose the government. We knew in our hearts that it wasn't really their fault; but still we felt they ought to do something about it.

What the government did was what governments often do when they find themselves in a situation that they cannot control but feel they ought to. They appointed an official: a minister with special responsibility for the drought, Mr Denis Howell. History does not relate what Mr Howell actually did as minister, but whatever it was, it worked. Within days of his taking office, it rained, and went on raining.

This was one of the points of inspiration for the book – not only in the sense that that particular episode forms a backdrop to some of the action, but also in a wider sense. It shows the tendency of governments and people living in advanced western civilisations, when confronted by some natural phenomenon that we cannot control, to react at first with fear and bewilderment, and then to set up some department of state to try and get that control back. I saw this process reflected in the fictional government in my novel: a government trying to control something which is perceived as troublesome – sexuality, particularly women's sexuality, and human fertility. Because one problem with trying to plan things for a nation, whether it is economics, public services, housing, roads, social control or whatever, is the sheer untidiness of human reproduction. Human beings have this tiresome tendency to have babies, and they do not always do it in

accordance with a national plan. If you could just find a way to control that it would make the business of governments so much simpler, in the same way that if you could control the weather it would make things simpler. Anyway, that was the first aspect of the year 1976 which inspired me to write *Benefits: the weather*.

My second point of inspiration was a political one. Thinking back to the year 1976, in which I started work on the book, I am reminded of William Wordsworth's comment about the French Revolution: 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, / But to be young was very heaven! [...]' (*The Prelude* bk. 11, lines 108-09). To say the same thing about being a young woman in Britain in 1976 involves only a small amount of exaggeration. It was not quite bliss or heaven, but I can tell you it was pretty good. It was a time of huge relief; I had spent much of my childhood dreading becoming an adult woman, and now that I was one I found it wasn't nearly as bad as I had feared. In fact, it was great. It was rewarding. It was fun.

Like many other girls from middle class backgrounds, I had grown up believing that although as a child I could have it all – I was the equal of any boy, and had the same rights to education, to freedom, to fun – once I became an adult woman all that would stop. It would stop firstly because discrimination against women was widespread – in employment, in social custom and social expectation, in tax and social security laws, in family law – and also because I believed that once I reached adulthood one of two terrible things was going to happen to me: either I would get married, in which case I would be required to put everything else that mattered to me to one side and devote myself primarily to my husband and my family; or else I would fail to get married, in which case I would live my life as an object of pity and contempt. To my eyes, it wasn't much of a choice.

But in the 1970s, with the rebirth of feminism within Britain, it suddenly became clear that these were not the only

choices, that there were lots other ways of living your life besides being traditionally married or traditionally single: you could live in groups, you could live in unmarried partnerships, or married ones with different rules, you could be a lesbian or gay, you could live alone through choice, you could have children or not have them, as you wished. In terms of work, there was a lot of campaigning going on for equality of pay, for equality of opportunity. New opportunities were opening up for women all the time, and there was a thriving feminist culture in the worlds of writing, art, publishing, music and dance as well as politics. I am not suggesting that all the problems of sexual politics had been solved; they hadn't in the 70s, and they still haven't now. But it was an exciting time to be a young and activist woman.

Among the campaigns for improvement in women's status, was one called the Wages For Housework Campaign. Their demand was that the government should pay a wage to any woman who was at home looking after children, so that she could be financially independent of her husband, and free of his control. It was a controversial campaign, even within the women's movement. Some feminists supported it, believing as I did that financial independence was a necessary precondition for equality; but others took the view that if you pay women to stay at home to look after children it will confirm them in that role and then they will never get away. Oddly enough, I found that argument as convincing as the other one. In the Wages For Housework debate, I was on both sides. Being on both sides is not a very comfortable position to be in ideologically, but it is the perfect posture from which to write a novel.

The Wages For Housework debate took place mainly on the fringes of politics, among pressure groups and radical movements. Within mainstream politics, it had its reflection in the furore over Child Benefit.

The Labour government had been promising for some time to introduce this new payment. It would only be a few

pounds per child per week, but it was an acknowledgement that bringing up children costs money, and unlike most social security benefits it was to be paid directly to mothers. It would not be a wage for housework; you could not live on it; but it would have been some sort of acknowledgement of the work that mothers did, and their need to have money of their own. But then at the last minute the government changed its mind and said that they were not going to pay it to mothers, but to the main family breadwinner, which in most cases meant the father. Outrage followed. For the women's movement it was a clear illustration of men in government saying 'Men are in charge, men must control the family income, women must go on being subservient and dependent.' In the end we managed to get it changed, so that money did get paid to women. This, again, was going on in 1976, and all these things coming together made me decide to write this novel.

I knew it was going to be called *Benefits* right from the beginning. Sometimes the title does not come until much later, but in this case I had it right from the beginning. And I also knew that I was going to have to do a lot of research for it, but it would not be ordinary sorts of research. The research that I did for a later novel, *Stand We at Last*, much of which was set in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, could be done in books, libraries, museums and by talking to people who had lived through the times that I was writing about. But you cannot research the future in that way; it has not happened. You can only look at the present and the past, and then invent. So I enrolled in an evening class about social policy, and learned all I could about how the welfare state had developed. Then I used my imagination.

The novelist Doris Lessing has this to say about the role of the writer in politics:

I see no reason why writers should not work in their role as citizens for a political party, but they should never allow themselves to be obliged to publicise a particular party line unless their own passionate

need as writers make them do so, in which case the passion might, if they have talent enough, make literature out of propaganda. (81)

I agree. I never saw it was my job to propagate a party line, either when writing *Benefits* or at any other time. I wrote it to ask questions, most of which begin with the phrase ‘what if ...’ What if a British government paid an allowance to women to encourage them to stay at home and look after children? Would that mean more equality or less? Would it mean more social justice or less? More happiness or less? It was with those questions in my mind that I began writing the novel.

So there were some of my influences: the weather, sexual politics, party politics. Here is another one: a movie, Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*. When I first saw it, in the mid-70s, the actual date 2001 was a long time in the future. The world of the film was strange and marvellous: people travelling to distant planets, and computers that talked. It was a new and unrecognisable world. And then suddenly, in a scene in which there are two men sitting at a table in a space research station, a door opens and guess who comes in carrying a tray with two cups of coffee on it. A woman, a very glamorous woman whom we had not seen before and, indeed, whom we do not see again. That is her role, to provide domestic service for the important men. And I thought, well, obviously in this particular fantasy of the future some things have changed, but some things have not; let us see if we can write a book in which they do. So that was another influence. That scene struck a nerve, and sometimes when you strike a nerve you get a novel.

And finally, in this exploration of influences on *Benefits*, I turn back to George Orwell and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. I was of course aware, as I started writing this book in 1976, that one of the most famous dates in dystopian fiction was only eight years in the future. And whereas there was no guarantee that *Benefits* would still be in print in eight years’ time, or even that it would be published at all, I sort of hoped that it would still be around. 1984 was a famous date, and I couldn’t ignore it. I didn’t want

to ignore it, I want to acknowledge it, build on it and move on from it. So at the beginning of the second part of the book I wrote this:

Nineteen eighty-four came and went, but the discussion continued: had Orwell been right? Public opinion was divided. On a literal level, clearly he had not been. The nation had its problems, but the inborn good sense of its people had saved it from the excesses he foresaw. The country did not lie in thrall to an autocracy of left or of right: government was sluggish and pragmatic; proportional representation ensured frequent changes of party in power, but rare changes of policy. Outside parliament, of course, the fascist right kicked and spat at the Marxist left, but these factions cancelled each other out, proving if anything that freedom of political thought still existed. Inside parliament, individual MPs kept up their outward allegiance to the parties for which they had been elected, but in effect it was government by pact and coalition. For, whatever their differences, the major parties were united in their perplexity as to why the coming of North Sea oil had not brought economic recovery on anything like the scale promised by their now-retired colleagues, and in their anxiety over what was to be done to appease their restive neighbours in the European community. No – the prospect of a one-party tyranny or a single-minded big brother overseeing every act and thought of the people, and bending them to his nefarious aims, was the least of Britain's worries [...] And yet there were those who saw uncanny fulfilment of Orwell's prophesies. Here, for example, with the misnamed bureaucracies: ministries for law and order, health and welfare, that had ceased to dispense either; organisations for racial harmony whose main function was encourage blacks to accept voluntary repatriation; and all-male committees to promote sex equality. Here were the promises to keep the people together: *when the oil is flowing everything will be fine* had had to be replaced with *when the oil is flowing more abundantly ...* or *when the oil that belongs to us, as distinct from that which was mortgaged to foreign bankers to shore up governments in the seventies ...* *when the Arabs stop fooling around with world prices ...* *when we've brought inflation under control ...* then you can have your jobs back, and your hospital beds and your housing and all these other state bounties which you cannot believe are not your right.

And the dying welfare state brought its won newspeak as well: government's failure to link child benefit, unemployment pay and so on to the cost of living was *the fight against inflation*; putting children on half-time schooling was referred to as *giving parents a free hand*;

closing hospitals and dumping dying patients on the doorsteps of unwarned and distant relatives was *community care*; and a new political movement that saw remedies to the whole predicament, if only the nation's women would buckle down to traditional role and biological destiny, was known quite simply as FAMILY. (37-39)

That was one acknowledgement of Orwell and his enormous achievement in introducing the year 1984 into the language before it had even happened. Another way in which I feel that I was influenced by Orwell was the way he captures in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* the dreadful day-to-day greyness of the world of Winston Smith. It is not simply that people get tortured and killed, that they disappear. That is the worst thing. But even if it does not get that far, there is the day-to-day boredom and dreariness of life before that happens. The food tastes bad, work is boring, conversations are controlled, sex is restricted and you are never alone and never unobserved. I think he captures that brilliantly in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and I wanted to get something like that in my novel because I felt that that vision was much more convincing than the sort of *2001: A Space Odyssey* vision of the future. The day-to-day dreariness of life in a totalitarian state, existing alongside the terror, was something that I wanted to write about.

And then, of course, there is the issue of the people whom Orwell calls 'the cranks' – the vegetarians, the teetotallers, the Quakers, the fruit-juice drinkers and all the rest. For him in his analysis of Socialism, these people are an embarrassment; for me in my novel, they are the heroes of the story. I write about people on the fringe: I write about squatters, I write about a woman who initially does not want to have children and then changes her mind and has a child, I write about a lesbian couple, I write about a modern-day embodiment of the Greek mythical character of Cassandra whose fate is always to tell the truth, but never to be believed. I wanted to write about people for whom politics do not stop at the ballot-box or the political meeting, people who don't simply state their

political beliefs but try to live them. This was my approach. The personal is political. What if the slogans were embodied in a political system, and in day to day life? How would people live? What would happen to them?

Sexual politics are central to *Benefits*. They are virtually ignored by Orwell. As far as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is concerned, this doesn't matter very much. This is a novel about a man in conflict with other men; he happens to be in love with a woman, but she is a fairly minor character. I have no objection to that. You cannot expect a writer to write about everything all the time, and you cannot criticise a book for not being another book unless it is pretending to be. In criticising Orwell for ignoring sexual politics, I am thinking much more of *The Road to Wigan Pier* which was supposed to be a book about the working class in England in the thirties and is in fact a book about some working-class men in England in the thirties. It pays very little attention to the situation of women. Like many patriarchal authors, Orwell writes a book about men and pretends that it is about everybody. He writes about poverty as a problem caused by low wages and inadequate benefits; but does not address the issue of income distribution within families, or the sort of poverty that occurs where you may have a head of household, a male breadwinner, who is earning a certain wage, who is getting a certain benefit, and chooses not to share it equitably with his wife and his children. This was a live issue at the time; some sections of the women's movement and Socialist movement had been campaigning for family endowments payable to mothers since 1917. Orwell could not have been unaware of the surrounding controversy, unless of course he chose to be unaware of it. I, by contrast, chose to make it central to my novel.

1984 has indeed come and gone. An occupational hazard of writing about the future is that the future becomes the present, and then the past; and your words may come back to haunt you.

Orwell was safely dead by 1984, so nobody could tell him to his face that he got it wrong – or right, for that matter. But I am still around, and I know the ways in which reality has deviated from fiction. There are two really important developments of the 1980s and 1990s which I did not foresee at all and which have transformed the lives of all of us. The first is mass computing: the change from computers being mysterious presences in locked rooms, operated by scientists in white coats, to being everyday equipment that millions of people have access to, millions of people own and use for work and for fun. The other change is the tragic fact of AIDS, which has changed lives and destroyed lives, and altered the way people talk and think about sexuality. Whether it has actually altered the way people practise it, I would not like to hazard a guess, but it has changed the culture of sexuality and sexual politics in a way that perhaps makes *Benefits* sound a little bit quaint at times.

Attitudes to motherhood and work in Britain have not gone down the *Benefits* road. Neither governments nor any other serious mainstream organisations are putting pressure on women to stay at home. If anything, the opposite is true; some government policies seem to be based on the assumption that staying at home looking after children really is not enough, and that women, particularly if they claim any kind of state benefit, should be required to take a paid job as well. This is something with which I disagree. It does seem to me that raising children, although not the only thing that women or men want to do, is a hard day's work, a serious job. It seems to me that if people want to do it full time, they should be able to, they should not be required to do something else.

On the plus side, I did manage to invent a charismatic princess who identifies herself with the underclass, and I did foresee a European superstate. So I did not get it all wrong.

At the end of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Orwell's vision is pessimistic. His hero is defeated: "Two gin-scented tears trickled down the sides of his nose. But it was all right, everything was

all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother' (256). For my two heroines the struggle is not over at all. My novel ends with two old ladies sitting on a pile of bricks, working out a strategy to storm a building, a tower block. Although they want to do it, they think that it may not be very practical, because they have no weapons, there are only two of them, they are old and frail.

She sat on a pile of bricks as if very tired. She glared at Lynn. 'I dare you' she yelled, and to calm her Lynn said, 'Maybe if we wait a while some others'll come and help us.'

They sat together in silence watching the sun come up. It was going to be one of those odd mornings when it was the sky at the same time as the moon, racing with the clouds. (214)

I think my ending is less pessimistic than Orwell's. Orwell really closes the door. There is no bright light at all. There is not even a suggestion that the struggle continues. Whereas I want to suggest that although bad things have happened, good things have happened too, and as long as there is somebody who still wants to make things better, things can improve. Bleak, pessimistic endings can be a bit of a cop-out. They are too easy; you can just bring down the curtain on the moment you want, and walk away. Happy endings, by contrast, run the risk of being sentimental. If I had written an ending in which the women all got together and all agreed on what they wanted, and put their demands to the government, and the government said 'yes, all right, we'll do that,' and then that was the end of the novel, I do not think anybody would have believed a word of it. But the idea that the individuals continue to try and make changes and make things better, makes *Benefits* a bit more utopian than dystopian. The struggle is not over. It continues. Two old women versus a tower block. You must take your choice.

(In answer to questions from the floor)

Benefits was first published by a feminist press. Did you come under pressure to write in accordance with any particular political line?

No. As I have already said, I agree with Doris Lessing's line on this – as quoted above – and I would have resisted any pressure to be doctrinaire or write the book in a way that did not accord with what I wanted to do. But there was no such pressure. The book that was published is the book that I wanted to write. In writing *Benefits*, I set out to make fiction of sexual politics, to explore and dramatise sexual politics – and of course it is no coincidence that a feminist press should choose to publish it, because those were the issues that interested them too.

Most fiction, from great classics to pulp, is at some level about the way men and women relate to each other. If you took that theme out of all fiction, there would be not much left. And if you start from certain presuppositions, as I did – the world that I grew up in had very fixed ideas about what men do and what women do – and you challenge that, the whole edifice is blown to smithereens, and each smithereen contains a story. I wrote a novel called *Closing* in the eighties, which was about a group of women training to become high pressure saleswomen, and dealing with the world of business. *Here Today* was a detective story in which the central character is a woman who has just lost her job, lost her partner, lost her sense of self; she is going to solve the crime and rediscover herself. Different novels, different genres, but each one inspired by a belief that old ideas about sex roles had to change, and a fascination with what happens when they do change. I have never seen feminism as a restriction on my writing; quite the contrary, it gives me ideas.

Where I have come under pressure – not with *Benefits*, but with other books, and with both feminist and mainstream publishers – is when it comes to marketing the book. My view is

that the marketing strategy should be tailored to fit the book, but some people in the industry think it should be the other way round. I have on occasions been urged to write more quickly – to produce one book per year, to fit in with a marketing plan. (I normally take between two and four years to complete a novel.) I have been asked to set parts of a story in a particular town because the publishers have good contacts in that town and know that a bit of ‘local interest’ would help to sell the book. I was also once told by an editor that a novel I offered her ‘is not your next book.’ What she meant was that she could not see any way of marketing it as my next book – therefore, according to her, it could not be my next book, notwithstanding the fact that I had indubitably written it after the one before and before the subsequent one. This sort of thing can be upsetting and frustrating, but it is not about sexual politics; it is an issue of author-publisher politics, and you had better not get me started on that!

In Benefits, and also in your new novel Other Names, you write about tensions in the mother-daughter relationship. Do you think this is an issue of sexual politics?

That is an extremely interesting question; I have never thought about that before, so any answer I give will be very tentative.

In *Benefits*, Lynn is the character who is doubtful about having children. She does not really want to do it. She is scared of the commitment and the work involved. She actually changes her mind and tries to get pregnant with her husband on the night when the rain starts, because when the rain came back people went a bit hysterical and that was her way of going hysterical – she pulled her husband into bed and said ‘make me pregnant.’ It was not that simple, but it was a change of impulse. When the child is born, she has a congenital illness called cystic fibrosis which, although it is manageable in many cases, it demands a huge commitment of work from the child’s

parents. So here is this woman who did not even want children in the first place, and now she has a child who makes even bigger demands on her than a healthy child would. But she loves the child too and she develops a sort of possessiveness where she is looking after the child and yet she is resenting her lost freedom.

In *Other Names*, once again there is a feminist mother, Julia, whose daughter Heather rebels against her mother's unconventionality by becoming much more conservative. But in this case the mother, Julia, knows that she owes her politics to Heather; that it was her own experience as a single mother in the early 1960s that brought her to a political struggle which is now an essential part of her identity.

In both books, you have daughters who exasperate their radical mothers by falling in love with men who are, in the mothers' terms, totally unsuitable – i.e. conservatives and traditionalists. I was setting out to explore the ambivalence that can exist alongside love between a mother and a child; but whether these are about sexual politics or something else entirely, I am not sure. I need to think about it some more.

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The Retelling of History Through Her Story

Acknowledging the leading role of women in both the private and the political, the twentieth century has been recently labelled as women's century. To Natasha Walter,

The link that feminists made between the personal and the political shattered the complacency of the traditional masculine viewpoint. The knowledge that one can no longer say 'man' and mean 'human' is both a small and revolutionary change. Women have questioned the universality of almost every traditional theory and the earlier certainties of politics, of psychology, of social policy, of literary criticism, have been shaken as a result. (57)

Hence, if 'the personal is the political,' the issue women writers must focus on is their personal experiences of fiction to convince their readers of the need for continuing with feminist policies.

Although feminism has emerged and withdrawn from the political stage during this century, looking backwards to the literary history of the twentieth-century from a feminist perspective leaves no doubt whatsoever, of the importance of the figure of the female author. According to Gayle Greene, there has been quite a 'critical omission' of women's writing during the first half of the present century:

Literary history continues to be the history of literature by men, and generalizations [...] continue to exclude women writers. At their best, male critics pay women writers a kind of superficial tribute [...], but more typically, they ignore them [...] or dismiss them [...]. Clearly, the numerous studies of twentieth-century women writers which have appeared since 1975 [...] have not redirected the 'mainstream' of literary history [...]. Besides, though the twentieth century is nearly at

an end – and this is the century that has produced more major fiction by women than all ages preceding – no literary history of twentieth-century women writers has yet been written. This is particularly striking in relation to the novel, the genre in which women writers and readers have figured most prominently. (*Changing the Story* 37-38)

It is also true, according to Gayle Greene again, that ‘the political consciousness [...] fostered a reaction against change for women’ (*Changing the Story* 39) not only during the thirties but again during the eighties, twice during this century, making feminism appear again with renewed strength each time. We have already identified three different feminist movements: the first, the second and the third wave, each one split from the other not only by women’s increasing concerns about equality within each single movement, but also disjoined by a powerful male agenda which sought to regain ‘men’s stable positions’ as breadwinners and controllers of the public dimension of everyday life.

However, the over-used feminist statement, ‘the personal is political,’ has been crucial to every one of the three uprising moments of feminism and has directed the feminist agenda, since the first political movement, transforming the perception of the external world. It is not only the idea of women’s inner oppression being voiced to counteract male political and social dominance but also the concept of *re-doing*: re-visioning, rewriting, remoulding, revisiting, reworking, etc. This concept of *re-taking* the tradition – at the core of Postmodernism as well – has been seen as the clarifying standpoint where women have positioned themselves, it has made the feminist agenda to *re-consider* all those (literary) worlds within this world where the feminine has been underestimated.

As Patricia Duncker maintains, ‘inventing history has always been a writer’s prerogative’ (124). She goes a bit further and says that ‘rewriting history so that we [women] too are actually *dramatis personae* has been one of the projects of contemporary feminism’ (124). Hence, no one will be surprised

when told that one of the narrative strategies in feminist fiction is the use of history as a fictional setting to portray women's lives. In fact, this is what connects both Zoë Fairbairns's *Stand We at Last* (1983) and Kate Atkinson's *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* (1995) since both 'present to the reader real historical events' (Hutcheon 92). However, neither of them are 'real' in the sense that history – as a discipline – is seen, because these 'real historical events' are perceived differently through the eyes of the characters and narrative voices and, consequently, through the eyes of the reader.

In my opinion, though both novels under discussion here are family sagas, these novels are also accounts of what history has recorded of the story of womankind. Hence, it seems to me that the mapping of history through the story of several generations of women, as it appears in both narratives, displays how women's history has been so alien to the description of the events which have characterised this century. Moreover, the use of textual strategies in their works enables both authors to appropriate, in quite a dissimilar way, the male tradition that has minimised theirs. Furthermore, the representation of historical events through the lives of women makes those historical events be transformed, on the one hand, by the female characters' perception of reality and, on the other, by the creation of a new reality. Consequently, appropriating Linda Hutcheon's words: 'narrative itself could be seen, then, as a natural mental act, as much a part of life as art [...]. We always tell stories – to escape, to remake, to alter our past and our future' (89). As a matter of fact, this is why Gayle Greene maintains that 'feminism is a re-membling, a re-assembling of our lost past and lost parts of ourselves' ('Feminist Fiction' 300). For her, feminist fiction needs to use 'memory' because, as she declares 'forgetting is a major obstacle to change. One of the most painful facts about the struggle for emancipation is that we have to keep starting it over again' ('Feminist fiction' 298). Her declaration is based on the two 'backlashes' that

feminism has suffered during the twentieth century. The act of remembering, recalling the past and the 'struggle for emancipation' will prevent women's search for their past once and again.

The creation of alternative scenes in that fiction that tries to recall the past, rewriting history, needs to use irony as a mechanism that deconstructs history constructing 'herstory.' The use of those textual and narrative devices, which have been already pointed out, as inherent devices in the construction of these fictional works that rewrite the history of the twentieth century directs our attention to the use of history in recent feminist fiction and make us understand that, even though this century has witnessed some of the most important changes in the emancipation of women, history is still very much a male preserve. Thus, to rewrite history the woman author needs to use irony for, as Nancy Walker maintains:

The relativity implicit in irony – the ability to stand apart from the authority of conventional values and systems – requires an unsentimental intelligence and a courageous wit, qualities not easily compatible with the traditional expectations of women. It is for this reason that the frequent use of irony in the contemporary novel by women is particularly significant: it represents a challenge to traditional values, recognition that the structures that cause and perpetuate women's oppression are arbitrary and therefore subject to change. The ironic stance, which insists upon the contrast between two alternative realities, forces a revision of the self that is objectified in the double narrative employed in so many of these novels. (27-28)

Thus, it is my contention that both Fairbairns's and Atkinson's aim in their depiction of a female saga is to rewrite individual woman's stories through history thus creating a history of womankind, i. e., what Lyn Pykett names the fate of 'the daughters of England' (71) through the use of that irony that Nancy Walker mentions as an integral part of the task of rewriting history (31-33). It is not just a case of writing genre novels or, in the case of Zoë Fairbairns, of a *roman à these*, but to

display how, even though women have discovered the twentieth century as the century of female emancipation there is still a difficulty in each individual woman to assert this emancipation in the domestic sphere as it is revealed in the narratives. Moreover, as Patricia Duncker comments about Fairbairns's work: 'a historical family saga which spans the period of two women's revolutions, a period within the condition of women has been profoundly changed, needs to envisage that change with a radical reading of history, not a heaped accumulation of isolated issues' (125). Yet, in my opinion, Duncker seems not to perceive that Fairbairns – like Atkinson in this case – only tries to portray the difficulties that the century of women's liberation still imposes on women within the dual reading of whether to highlight the personal or the political.

Consequently, in this paper, it is my intention to demonstrate how these works of fiction delineate the dual agenda of feminism: the personal and the political domains, through the rewriting of historical facts, and how these two spheres are so deeply entangled in women's reality as to create an unbearable tension between them. Taking into account that history is not an objective discipline, these authors have undertaken the task of reuniting both worlds demonstrating, on the one hand, how the political complicates the personal and, on the other, how difficult it is for the personal to become political. The analysis that will follow, therefore, is based on a study of the narrative devices, such as textual irony, narrative voices and point of view, within each work and the rewriting of historical facts in relation to the story of individual characters. Through these points and the comparison of both works as revisions of history inside the feminist tradition I intend to demonstrate how the conception of history – whether as an illusion or a reality – changes when the role of women during the twentieth century is under question.

Zoë Fairbairns's *Stand We at Last* was published in 1983. The novel covers the story of several generations of women

from the 1850s to the 1970s. According to Patricia Duncker, Fairbairns's novel 'combines two recognisable, highly marketable popular types of genre fiction: the domestic family saga and the romantic novel' (124). In short, the novel goes through the lives of the family started with the Crofts – Helena and Jonathan – and Helena's emigrant sister Sarah Weeks/Packham. In Lyn Pykett's words,

Strengthened and hardened by her Australian experience Sarah returns to find her sister dead, partly, as Sarah later deduces, as a result of the gonorrhoea she has caught from her husband, Jonathan. Helena is the unwitting victim of the Victorian double standard of sexual morality, whose other side is traced in the experiences of Lizzie, Jonathan's erstwhile mistress – turned prostitute – and mother of his illegitimate daughter Pearl. Pearl's unpropitious beginnings end in happy and purposeful marriage, watched over by Sarah, an increasingly militant suffragette. The remainder of the novel traces the stories of Pearl's daughter Ruby, her grand-daughter Emma, and her great-grand-daughter Jackie, and through them represents the evolving history of the century's daughters, from the struggle for the vote to the new wave of feminist struggle in the 1960s. (75-76)

In Atkinson's *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* there are only three generations of women who appear through the story of Ruby Lennox: her mother Bunty, her grandmother Nelly, her step-great-grandmother Rachel and her great-grandmother Alice, though there are references to the rest of the family: aunts, cousins, etc. There coexist two stories in the novel: Ruby Lennox's story, which starts with her conception in 1951 and reaches up to the 1990s, and the story of her foremothers. Unlike Fairbairns's linear description of the story of the family, Ruby's narrative voice recalls her family's past through the objects belonging to them and passing from one generation to the next in a flash-back flash-forward technique spanning the whole century. Though Atkinson's and Fairbairns's narratives differ in their account of historical events, it is clear that the historical moment in which each of the individual characters

dwells has a bearing on the development of their deeds and the plot's action.

According to Nancy Walker, the rewriting of history seems to question authority:

Contemporary women writers have a different but related concern, which is that the stories or scripts not only *describe* what is assumed to be women's experience, but also attempt to *prescribe* appropriate roles and responses. By re-telling these stories, women question their authority precisely by showing them to be stories, or fantasies. (31-32)

However, as it has already been noted in Patricia Duncker's comment on Fairbairns's novel, it seems to me that *Stand We at Last* does not question authority on the grounds Walker associates to women writing. Rather than subvert the very principles of historiography, Fairbairns seems simply to contradict the official recording of history with the individual perception of the historical facts in the events lived by each of her female characters. On the other hand, Atkinson's *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* focuses on an individual rewriting history, which questions authority in the personal sphere. Thus, the rewriting of history seems to focus on the family background that makes each individual woman's story grounded on her foremothers.' Again Nancy Walker's words best describe this device:

Another type of revision of history is the revision of one's personal history. One of the most pervasive devices in the contemporary women's novel is the dual narrative voice that represents a duality of consciousness – the second, usually first person voice interprets, adjusts, revises the initial story. The effect is to reinforce the fact that we invent our own stories trying to find a coherent pattern. (33)

In Atkinson's work this device is seen clearly, as has already been mentioned: Ruby Lennox tells her story and through her story the story of the women in her family: mother,

grandmother, great-grandmother, etc. For instance, the novel starts with Ruby's own words on her conception: 'I exist' (9). Then she goes on to explain where she has started to exist but also where her existence has taken place, her family and surroundings: 'we live in a place called 'Above the Shop'' (9). And she ends her exposition explaining the history of the place in which she will be born: 'these streets seethe with history' (10). From now on, the focus of the narrative will move from Ruby's personal history to some historical events and her *foremothers'* history when Ruby thinks it necessary to be explained. The first person account leads the narrative and decides which information must be released to the readers and when. However, in Fairbairns's novel the focus on the personal story is only used to give the information previously secreted by some character as each chapter shifts from one descendant to the next, due to her linear narration, with just occasional disruptions. For instance, through the use of the third person narrator and the stream of consciousness technique, the reader completes the information about Lizzie – Jonathan's former mistress – in the only chapter ascribed to a male character: Jonathan. Jonathan is forced by Sarah to complete the story of Pearl's mother and her 'pretended' death when Pearl was sent to live with him. It is in this moment that the reader is given the opportunity to complete the account of that individual's story:

He drew breath. What he felt was like real pain. Why bring this up now? He liked to pretend he had forgotten; but he would never forget the sound of Lizzie, his mistress, his former mistress, the mother of his child, announcing her own death. *Tell Pearl I be gone to the Good Place, Jonathan.* Sent to look for her at Sarah's bidding, he had found her after a long search [...] in the chilly household of a non-conformist minister [...]. And so Jonathan was to say that Lizzie was dead. (184-85)

Therewith, the way to insert the historical background and the individual stories in both novels is either through the living or through the belongings of the deceased. Fairbairns's linear

narrative needs history as a framework to the action of each individual character. However, the reader sometimes has to bring back to memory some aspects of the past that are crucial to the understanding of the present situation, as the example given above shows, in so far the text is somehow interrelated with the actions performed previously by some characters. Whenever Jackie – the last grown woman of Fairbairns's saga – or Ruby Lennox – the protagonist of the story in Atkinson's – need to understand their present situations they recall their foremothers and the difficulties they had to endure. In Fairbairns's fiction, Sarah Weeks/Packman lives up to the 1970s in the memory of her niece Ruby Barrington and appears to Ruby Barrington's own granddaughter, Jackie, as an outstanding woman of her time. Even the wardress that took care of Sarah Weeks/Packham when she was imprisoned affirms this causality of history appearing as the benefactress who founded the scholarship for female education that Jackie gets (445), for the wardress could not forget how the suffragette tried to convince her of her rights as a citizen during her imprisonment. Thus, this woman living at the turn of the nineteenth century 'won't forget' (272) and will help future generations of women searching for education. So, it seems clear that Fairbairns's rewriting of history takes care not to disrupt (but to support) the cause-and-effect chain of events.

Atkinson's insertion of the historical background in the story of the women portrayed is less respectful with cause-and-effect order. Whenever Ruby's narrative voice runs across an object belonging to her dead, or presumably dead, ancestors, she uses 'footnotes' at the end of each chapter to explain how those objects came to belong to somebody, together with the story around them. Thus, her narrative is broken in each chapter to account for the past using a flashback technique: 'she [Ruby's sister] is playing with her grandmother's button box and chooses a button, a pink-glass, flower-shaped one (see footnote i) and, carefully and deliberately, swallows it' (23). Nevertheless,

some stories are inserted in the narrative without using the 'footnote,' what may be due to the relevance of these other stories, such as when she tells the story of her mother and father in the first chapter (13). While the first person narrative voice of Ruby Lennox prevents any other intrusion of narrative voices when she tells the reader her personal history, the moment this voice transforms itself into the third person omniscient narrator of the 'footnotes,' history is given its background purpose in Atkinson's work:

This is the story of my grandmother's continually thwarted attempts to get married. When she was twenty-four, Nell became engaged to a policeman, Percy Sievwright, a tall, good-looking man and a keen amateur footballer. He played for the same Saturday league team as Nell's brother, Albert, and it was Albert who had introduced the pair of them. (45)

The first sentence is clearly the voice of Ruby Lennox while in the rest of the 'footnote' the speaker becomes a more distant objective chronicler, much like the average third person narrator. Therefore, Atkinson's plot combines both the linear narrative of the first-person narrator, which tells the contemporary story, with the disruptive narrative of an omniscient third person narrator, which tells the rest of the stories, whereas Fairbairns's narrative deploys the omniscient narrator in the third-person mode and the stream of consciousness of the characters in a linear plot throughout aside from several letters inserted in the main narrative.

If Patricia Duncker claims that the rewriting of history in one of the 'projects in feminist fiction' (124), Nancy Walker goes a bit further and affirms that 'by inviting the reader to mistrust what is said, the ironic writer causes us to question all reality' (28). The case of the two authors under analysis here does not only reflect what Walker and Duncker declare, but also demonstrates, as Lyn Pykett comments, that the contemporary woman author who uses history in her narrative 'does not

approach history analytically as an abstraction, but turns to the past as a web of lived relationships from which it seeks to recover a usable past' (76). Therefore, irony is a device to show the unreal or unbelievable 'pasts' that history has fixed down in two different ways.

The use of irony that Fairbairns's shows in *Stand We at Last* refers, generally, to the coincidences in the plot between generations. For instance, it is ironic that the wardress is saved by her former prisoner, Sara Weeks/Packman in the sinking of the Titanic. As it is ironic, too, that half a century later, it is Sarah's great grandniece the student that is given the scholarship the wardress created to endow women's education. These are the devices that show how history works for women, a clear case of cause and effect. Furthermore, Fairbairns appears to appreciate that it is ironic how life works differently for men and women. Jackie has to dig up information about the identity of the benefactress was and why she decided to put her money into education, whereas benefactors are generally given credit and popularity. Another use of irony in the narrative is the importance that the typing machine acquires for Sarah. It is an unmistakable proof of women's economic independence. Through Pearl's married life Sarah is always pushing Pearl to do some independent job, something that Pearl rejects as her place is at home with her family. However, when Pearl's daughter decides to learn to type for a living, Pearl feels her daughter has betrayed her: 'of course she knew as well as Ruby did that the old woman would have been an ally for Ruby in her determination to follow her brothers and take a job an earn a living' (273). Later Ruby realizes that her mother's opposition is just an act of 'getting revenge on Aunt Sarah' (274). Later in the narrative Ruby gives her own granddaughter, Jackie, the typewriter she bought to start a living after the war, in case she needs some money for the abortion she never has. Through the images of the scholarship and the typewriter, Fairbairns makes the reader reflect on women's history as an undercurrent in the

official history. It was money or the prospect of earning it that freed women from domesticity. The implicit irony in the recurrent image of the typewriter also shows how it is an important object in women's history, like the vote, contraception and divorce. Still Fairbairns uses history as a major discipline that can only be revised, not changed, through the lives of the women she portrays, and its fundamental principles remain untouched.

Atkinson's use of irony refers to the official and unofficial accounts of history and individual stories. History is conceived as a general untruth which every one is able to bend for one's own purposes. In the first generation, back to the past, Ada lies to their brothers and sisters in not telling them that their mother did not die giving birth to Ada's sister but eloped with the photographer who came across the day the baby was born. To the rest of the family Alice Barker died in childbirth honoured as a good woman and mother, and only one of her sons knows the truth, but he runs away, and Ada, who knows what he saw, cannot believe her beloved mother abandoned them and keeps the secret. This applies to Alice's husband and to his second wife too, who never tell the truth about Ada's mother dying at childbirth. Elsewhere in the novel there are instances in which the reader is confronted with the different versions of the stories circulating. Even Ruby Lennox, when talking about the coronation of the Queen, does it ironically:

How proud we all are on this day! How we look forward to our magical journey into the future as citizens of a brave new world. Patricia falls asleep, royal benedictions on her lips. 'God bless the Queen,' she murmurs [...], and an echoing murmur from the household ghosts vibrates on the evening air [...]. They have seen much happen within these ancient city walls, sieges and air-raids, fires and massacres, the rise and fall of empires [...]. Yet still they summon the strength to join Patricia in one last ragged, yet valiant cheer – glasses are raised in a toast, horns are blown and the great eagle of the Ninth is held aloft. *God bless us all!* (91)

Fairbairns, on the other hand, seems to be more respectful with history in this novel. She makes her female characters represent major aspects of the history of womankind from the 1850s to the 1980s yet never questions the official version. As Patricia Duncker has cleverly remarked:

Each section deals with a 'women's issue' identified as an important milestone by our own feminist historians: the medical and sexual abuse of women, the prostitution laws, the fate of illegitimate children, the struggle for the vote, the fate of women in the professions, women and war, the End of Empire, and the emergence of the present women's liberation movement out of radical student political movements in the 1960s. (124)

In Atkinson's novel some of the issues mentioned by Duncker about Fairbairns's novel also appear, such as 'women and war' and 'the fate of illegitimate children,' but the End of Empire is relegated in favour of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, and the emergence of the present women's liberation movement is individualised in Ruby Lennox's escape to Scotland. Furthermore, since both narratives exemplify the fate of illegitimate children – from Pearl herself down to Jackie's daughter in Fairbairns's novel, from Ruby Lennox's sister's up to Gillian's – one may question the importance of the issue for the feminist agenda. The fate of these children is almost never as happy as Pearl's in Fairbairns's narrative. The rest of the illegitimate children that appear in both works are either lost in adoption or in search of their unknown and dead mothers. Thus, it is not only official history that these authors question in their works but also the sexual politics underlying all the social and economic problems which single motherhood, for instance, meant up to not so long ago.

Another feature characterising the rewriting of history is, according to Nancy Walker, the use of fantasy:

Fantasy, like irony, is used [...] in its broadest possible sense. All fiction is in some sense a fantasy, in that it is an imaginative

construction, but the pervasive use of fantasy as a plot element, a narrative strategy, or a controlling form in the recent novel by women suggests an overwhelming need for imaginative release from objective reality. (30)

Walker does not identify the use of fantasy in the sense defended by Rosemary Jackson in her work *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion* as a 'negation of actuality and possibility' (1-4). But she refers to 'an element or strategy' of the narrative that permits the author to rewrite 'traditional stories,' 'even history itself' (Walker 30-31). This new conception of fantasy, still marking 'the unsaid and unseen of culture' (Jackson 4), as Walker notes, appears to be the grounding of both, Fairbairn's and Atkinson's, work, since:

The pervasive use of irony and fantasy as narrative devices in the contemporary novel by women [...] does call into question assumptions about identity, gender, relationships, and women's potential and achievements. Both devices propose alternatives – irony by pointing to a contrast between conventional surface reality and the possibility of another set of truths, and fantasy by promoting an imaginative recreation of experience [...]. The barriers to women's power and autonomy that the authors portray – barriers that irony and fantasy attempt to surmount or negate – are sufficiently strong and entrenched that [...] they are capable of reversing the trends that the women's movement has set in motion. Yet successive generations of readers will find in these novels women who rebel against oppression in a new kind of cautionary tale. (37)

It seems to me that Walker's distinction between the uses of fantasy and irony in the rewriting of history – irony as a contrast 'between conventional surface reality and the possibility of another set of truths,' and fantasy as 'promoting an imaginative recreation of experience' – establishes the difference between the two novels analysed. While Fairbairn's novel does not question history as a discipline but sets the incongruities of that history in the individual events of each character, thus making 'the possibility of another set of truths' feasible, Atkinson's

device in the rewriting of history contemplates both mechanisms: the ironic take on the established historical point of view and the imaginative recreation Ruby makes of her foremothers. Duncker's hypotheses, on the one hand, that Fairbairns's text does rely 'on cliché' (125) and, on the other, her awareness that Fairbairns's female saga is inhabited by 'the experience of oppression' reinforcing 'convention in odd ways' (124), possibly intensify Fairbairns's political viewpoint of women's struggle for emancipation. As a result of this premise, it seems that Fairbairns does not transform the rewriting of history into what Walker perceives as 'a cautionary tale,' describing the dangers of assuming as truth what that history has established about women's participation. On the contrary, Atkinson's commitment to the personal, to individual voices and experiences, may at first sight be considered less feminist-minded, less concerned with feminist issues. But, on the whole her novel acts as Walker's 'cautionary tale' since her vision of history and women's place in it are a story of women's incapability to come to terms with the political emancipation they have achieved.

Accordingly, throughout both novels the characters use fantasy, defined as a recreation of experience, to subvert the old standards and suggests new ones: romance is seen negatively at the core of sexual politics (illegitimate children), history as an objective discipline is considered unfair to women's cause (Sarah Weeks/Packham eccentricity, how the suffragettes used to be scorned), the marriage plot is rejected by the contemporary heroines (Jackie remains a single mother, Ruby divorces and stays single). In fact, the texts take the reader through the history of the 'daughters of England' and demonstrate, in quite different ways, how destructive the double standard set on them by societal lack of sympathy can be.

In fact, both authors act as readers and revisionists of that history which has relegated them to a marginal position and emphasise the history of the women who saw that century,

relegating to a background position the men who appropriated it. Still, Patricia Waugh's and Patricia Duncker's presumption that women's identity can be constructed in contemporary texts through the use of a 'collective' (Waugh 22) and encouraging female co-operation (Duncker 126) fails to see the hope both authors have in the construction of a female identity based on their working for 'ordinary, everyday equality' (Walter 257) that will prevent the appearance of the old habits recorded by these rewritings of history. As Lyn Pykett points out: 'while male writers seek to challenge the authority of the past by deconstructing the idea of history and converting it into a series of fictions, female perspective and make tell a different story: her story not history' (77).

At length, the relationship of these internal and external worlds with the feminist agenda stresses the vision of historical events as a partial one. Both Fairbairns and Atkinson reflect throughout the texts under discussion here that to superimpose the personal on the political or vice-versa can make women regain their identities while it can still be seen as an obstacle to set limits between what history has made them expect of themselves and what they can now claim to. The way in which history is deconstructed in these novels makes the reader question the validity of this discipline as an 'objective' discipline whose only goal is to record events as they seemed to have happened. Accordingly, the shift of perspective from 'history,' as a mere recording of facts of the past, to 'her story,' as how those facts affect women's lives, is the answer to the current discomfort with women's part in this discipline.

As a matter of fact, it seems that the texts' main difference resides in the distinction between the personal and the political that is being made. Fairbairns's *Stand We at Last* seems less personal because it relies on the official accounts of a history which is disconnected from the individual set of stories 'dealing with one women's issue.' On the other hand, Atkinson's *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*, by overlooking the

historical background to her narrative, seems to stress the importance of the personal domain of that 'the personal is the political' slogan. In conclusion, through two different rewritings of history which are separated by almost a decade of feminist consciousness raising, there appears the same problem, i. e., the difficulties that women have to come to terms to within a movement that obliges them to transform their personal lives into a political issue or their political ideas into their personal lives. Hence, as Natasha Walter maintains in her work titled *The New Feminism*:

So the new feminism must unpick the tight link that feminism in the seventies made between our personal and political lives [...]. But identifying the personal and the political in too absolute and unyielding a way has led feminism to a dead end. This generation of feminists must free itself from the spectre of political correctness. If feminism is to build on all the new female confidence that exists in Britain, it must not be trammelled by a rigid ideology that alienates and divides women who are working for the same end: increased power and equality for women. (4-5)

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Looking Backwards and Forwards from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: Women Writing Men's Worlds

In 1973, some ten years before the publication of *Kassandra* (English translation, *Cassandra*, 1984), the German writer Christa Wolf referred to a quote by Bertolt Brecht in an interview with Hans Kaufmann and explained how important Brecht's words had been for her. The quote ran: 'We have been all too keen to turn our backs on the immediate past and, hungry with curiosity, to look to the future. But the future will depend on whether we can come to terms with the past' (Wolf 29). Wolf stressed how important this dialectic between past and present was for her because it helped her to understand the social and psychological contradictions of her own 'here and now,' and the process of her literary creativity. In another interview, this time with the critic Joachim Walther, she explained how this process of creativity was constructed. In her work, she adopted Georg Büchner's strategy of writing in the 'fourth dimension,' which is a space integrating two subjectivities: that of the author and the characters she creates. The 'I' lives and experiences life in the first person singular but simultaneously becomes the creator of the 'S/He' in the third person singular. This 'fourth dimension' offers Wolf alternative insights to experience, which sometimes merge, but sometimes clash. Experience, here, is to be understood as 'memory, fantasy and social or moral consciousness' (xi) all of which are basic in her search for 'authenticity.' Authenticity is to be found in her creative imagination, as compared with 'truth,' which perhaps cannot be found at all. It is not surprising that she later chose to write about the visionary Cassandra who bridges three time

zones: the Greek myth of the past, the political situation of the 1980s, and an apocalyptic future. The mythical Cassandra tries to speak to the present, but her words fall on deaf ears, her prophecies are interpreted as hysterical ravings, devoid of truth. In short, her language does not make sense. *Cassandra* was written and published under the shadow of a wall dividing West Germany from East, a country divided into two with the wall signifying silence and death.

Historiography and autobiography are attempts to make sense of the past, attempts to create order out of a mass of documents and material, or out of snatches of memory. History can never be a complete articulation of the past 'as it really was.' Autobiography can never hope to be a complete representation of the author. The choice of events which happened in the past, the description of cause and effect, the decision to include or exclude certain details by looking backwards, however, do contribute towards the construction of the historian's own 'here and now,' or the autobiographer's own present subjectivity. Writing history, writing about self, always requires a relationship of complicity with language, one that is easily negotiable. The terms of the contract are complicated, however, and language always falls short of meaning, as the Monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* finds out to his dismay. Language is not the 'godlike science' he first thought it was, that brings people together in love and harmony, but is culturally constructed, man-made, and based on the specular. The Monster fast realises that his eloquence and 'mastery' of language is not enough to make others *overlook* his deformity. In a reversal of the Narcissus myth and in a rewriting of Eve's act of gazing into the pond in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the Monster catches sight of his deformed self in a pool and declares, 'I was in reality the monster that I am' (*Frankenstein* 114). It is this position, outside the symbolic order, that links the Monster's fate with the fate of women, defining himself, and them, as lack and absence, implying that the unitary self, the wholeness of masculinity,

rests on and signifies through, its other, which is femininity as hole (Morris 118).

These issues, language and truth, the writing of history, language and subjectivity, are all alluded to in the 'Appendix' to George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, titled 'The Principles of Newspeak.' The state rewrites history in order to construct a version of the past that would efficiently interpellate its subjects according to the needs of the state. History thus becomes a totalising uniform representation of what 'really happened,' leaving no gaps for alternative interpretations or readings between the lines. Newspeak is Oldspeak purged of ambiguities, metaphors, polysemy. Like the language of the Houyhnhnms in Part IV of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Newspeak offers no space for alternative thinking. Judith Adamson points to C. K. Ogden's invented language, 'Basic,' a reduced form of English into a mere 850 words, which seems to have influenced Newspeak (72, 206, note 15). Orwell very clearly illustrates how the complete imposition of Newspeak over Oldspeak would make human beings into puppets, incapable of any subversive acts or thoughts against the state, because if such acts remained 'nameless,' they were therefore also 'unimaginable' (266). The narrator of the 'Appendix' is nameless. Who is s/he? Is the author a similar authority on Oceania as is Professor Peixoto in 'The Historical Notes' of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*? Both are last chapters and force the reader to go back to the beginning of the books and reread the events which took place, but from a different perspective. Should the reader believe what she has read? Do Winston and Julia really exist? Do Offred and Gilead really exist? And what about the reader? Does she exist? Offred at one point in Atwood's dystopia certainly wills her into existence:

But I keep on going with this sad and hungry and sordid, this limping and mutilated story, because after all I want you to hear it [...]. By telling you anything at all I'm at least believing in you, I believe

you're there, I believe you into being. Because I'm telling you this story I will your existence. I tell, therefore you are. (279)

The narrator of 'The Principles of Newspeak' frequently uses the past perfect and the perfect conditional tenses to explain what 'might have been, if [...]' or to reassure the reader that Newspeak 'had been devised' but, apparently was no longer in use. Obviously, Newspeak could not be used as the only means of communication, and thus, the story of Winston's life and fate are related in Oldspeak. Oldspeak, however, is very discriminatory towards women. There is barely a sentence in the novel in which women are described in a positive light, unless it is the 'mystical reverence' Winston feels for the washerwoman towards the end of Part Two. Oldspeak is full of verbal violence against women, but Orwell fails to invent a word for this.

When women write dystopias, the theme of language is one of the main areas of criticism. The four futuristic dystopias I have chosen to discuss here, all offer alternative ways of deconstructing unitary truth, whether it is absolute, divine, scientific or historic truth. A utopia is a vision of an ideal society, projected either in the present, the future, or backwards in time. Utopia is always elsewhere, but never here. Although it indirectly constitutes a critique of the society in which it is constructed, utopia is invariably so different from reality as to be unrealisable. A dystopia, on the contrary, is often easily imaginable and recognisable and constitutes a warning of possible, immediate or future horrors, but at the same time it may advocate a policy of either no change, or, at least, little change.

The four dystopias in this paper might be defined as women's nightmarish visions of men's worlds. The themes I will discuss focus on gender politics, reproduction control, and language. Although I am aware that my discussion of the four novels seems to transcend factors of history and socio-political contexts, they do offer very interesting insights on the writing of memoirs and history, and the deconstruction of truth.

Two of these novels are futuristic dystopias describing the extinction of the human race, Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) and Montserrat Julió's *Memòries d'un futur bàrbar* (1975), both of which are the written memoirs of the last man alive on earth. Shelley's novel takes place in the year 2100, 'the last year of the world,' whereas Julió's nightmarish vision takes place in the year 2073. Although almost one hundred and fifty years separate the publication of the two novels, and many thousand kilometres geographically (Shelley wrote her novel in England, Julió in Barcelona), both novels envisage the end of the human race through plague, or through biological mutations. Both novels are written by women but are narrated by men. In both novels the voices of the female characters are resonant through their silences, although in Shelley's dystopia some of the female characters are actually more revolutionary than in the Catalan writer's. As both the plague and disease travel from one corner of the planet to another, wiping out the human race as they spread, Shelley and Julió take the opportunity of offering small glimpses of utopia. Death and love are the great levellers and destroyers of all social injustices in Shelley's nightmare. In Julió's, panic and distress might bring people together in solidarity, and create hope for a new society which introduces laws legalising divorce and abortion, and protects illegitimate children, but these laws exist only in passing. Julió's dream soon turns into a nightmare of chaos, crime, and eventually a city, a country, a world of the dead.

The other two novels that this paper will discuss were written in the interwar period by two British women who were actively involved in the struggle against fascism. Charlotte Haldane wrote *Man's World* (1926) which was translated into Spanish in the same year and published as *El mundo del hombre* by Editorial Aguilar. Katherine Burdekin wrote *Swastika Night* (1937) but published under the male pseudonym, Constantine Murray. This antifascist novel was included in Victor Gollancz's Left Book Club in 1940 (Patai, 'Imagining Reality' 236).

Although Haldane's novel has not been republished, Burdekin's has, thanks to the critic, Daphne Patai, who sees Burdekin's dystopia as an important point of reference for Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, although there is no evidence that he actually read it.¹ *Man's World* depicts a world divided into two sections after a great chemical war: a scientific state which covers North America, Australasia and Europe, with its centre in Nucleus and the rest of the world which is only referred to through allusions to otherness. In *Swastika Night*, the world has also been split into two parts, both at war with each other: Europe has been under Nazi domination for seven hundred years, and the other half of the world is under the rule of the Japanese. In the depictions of the scientific state in *Man's World* and the militaristic state in *Swastika Night*, women are reduced to their biological functions, and are either vocational mothers in the Garden Cities in Nucleus or they are herded into cages like cattle in the Nazi state. In Haldane's work, the sex of unborn babies can be predicted and controlled. The power – and pride – of the Vocational Mothers comes under threat when male scientists suggest that the day will soon come when the number of mothers might be reduced to one, a sort of queen bee, who will guarantee the reproduction of the [white] races. The women, or rather Unwomen, of *Swastika Night* are mere projections of male abjection. They have lost all sense of pride in themselves and thus do not desire to give birth to baby girls. Very few baby girls are being born and the human race might come to an end, and ironically with it, the male supremacist empires.

The ability to predict the sex of unborn babies has long been one of the objectives of science and of many governments. In *Examen de Ingenios*, first published in 1594, Huarte de San Juan lamented the fact that, for every boy that was born, there

1 See Daphne Patai's 'Orwell's Despair, Burdekin's Hope: Gender and Power in Dystopia' (1984) and 'Imagining Reality: The Utopian Fiction of Katherine Burdekin' (1993).

were six or seven girls: 'Por donde se entiende, o que Naturaleza está ya cansada, o que hay algún error de por medio que le estorba el obrar como quería' (631).² When the percentage of the female population exceeds that of the male population, this has been defined by patriarchal discourse as either a defect of Nature, or as occurred in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Britain, 'the surplus women problem.' The reasons for this fear in the past were undoubtedly material. If women were not independent economically, then their survival depended on either finding a husband or some other source of income. The reversal of this fear, that the proportion of men might by far exceed that of women, is an even graver matter and if taken to an extreme might even bring about the end of the human race. This has become one of the popular themes of dystopian and science fiction and gives rise to visions of men's worlds, inhabited by man, controlled by men, where women are either kept as glorified mothers or as reproductive machines, in order to guarantee the survival of the race. Or the women might not exist at all!

Although all-women utopias such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915) exist, there seems to be no depiction of an all-male utopia or dystopia in the literature of the west. Nevertheless, the second creation myth in Genesis might be read as an attempt to establish an all-male utopia: a male God creates another male (Adam) in his image and likeness, without the help of a woman, thereby having absolute control over reproduction, and with it, the control of language. In terms of the debate nature/culture and the construction of subjectivity, Adam might be seen as the only being not culturally constructed. It is true, that language existed before the creation of Adam, God having created the universe through the Word, but little in the Garden of Eden had been defined previous to

2 'Whichever way one looks at it, either Nature is already tired, or there is some fault somewhere which hinders her from being able to work as she desires' (my translation).

his creation. The case of Eve is different. Eve is created into a language which symbolises and projects Adam's desire: he names her Woman 'because she was taken out of Man,' after having carried out God's instructions to name all the plants and creatures. Eve is Adam's Other, and as Milton suggests in *Paradise Lost*, her identity is associated with the material, with what is visible and earthly, with Nature. Adam, on the other hand is associated with the invisible (God is invisible), and with transcendence, power and reason:

O thou for whom
And from whom I was form'd flesh of thy flesh,
And without whom am to no end, my guide
And head [...] (4.440-43)

The Mind/Body split turns up in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which is a rewriting of Genesis and *Paradise Lost*. Victor Frankenstein, the male scientist, creates a male in his laboratory, the first of a 'new species' who 'would bless [him] as its creator and source' (54). The fact that Frankenstein wanted to create a race of male humans only is hinted at when he decides to destroy his second creation: the Monster's female companion. The violent manner in which he destroys her exceeds what was necessary to prevent her from living and exaggerates the materiality of the act. In his second workshop of filthy creation, and in the presence of a voyeur (the Monster) whose monstrous gaze defines the scene, Frankenstein, 'trembling with passion, [...] tore to pieces the thing on which [he] was engaged' (166). The reasons Frankenstein gives for violating her body are important because these reasons crop up in subsequent dystopian novels and horror films, and have their origin in the male fear of female sexuality. He destroys the female Monster because she might become ten thousand times worse than the male, because she might refuse to obey the male monster, because she might turn away from him in disgust and prefer to mate with a human, because she might mate with the male

monster and give birth to a whole race of devils and last, but certainly not least, because Frankenstein would consequently lose control over the reproduction of this race.

The nightmarish qualities of this monstrous male world, created by Frankenstein, have their parallel in an equally monstrous female world, where artistic creation and procreation are either doomed to sterility, miscarriages, or to abortion. No mothers survive in the novel. In the celebrated 1831 introduction to *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley affectionately refers to her novel as a 'hideous progeny' and also refers to a trip that she and Percy B. Shelley made to the 'Mer de Glace' at Chamonix, with its subtle resonances of the sterile mother, the 'Mère de Glace.' To give birth to is equal to bringing to light (as in the Spanish rendering, 'dar a luz'), and Mary Shelley's introduction to her dystopian novel, *The Last Man* echoes this use of the childbirth metaphor. Male writers of the Romantic period also exploited the childbirth metaphor in their acts of creativity with the objective of self assertion and self creation, but Mary Shelley does so by writing from her own very tragic experience of motherhood and failed pregnancies which she then projects into both the creative and political arena. In the 'Author's Introduction' to *The Last Man*, Shelley describes how she and a male companion descend to an underground womblike cavern in Italy with tortuous, damp passageways and waterholes, and come upon the Cumaean Sibyl's cave, which is large and circular, with a raised stone in the middle. On the floor of the cave there are 'piles of leaves, fragments of bark, and a white filmy substance' (2) which, on closer observation, reveal written characters. It is the male companion who recognises them as the Sibylline leaves, inscribed with the words of many different languages. It is the Author, however, who translates them and renders them into the story of the earth's last man, although she is conscious that they 'have suffered distortion and diminution of interest and excellence in [her] hands' (4).

The Last Man, like most of Mary Shelley's writing, describes a world mainly inhabited by men, and narrated by a man. It depicts an apocalyptic man-made world in the year 2073 in which a deadly plague kills off the whole human race until only one man survives. He is the narrator and writer of the tale. Based on the anti-despotic *Ruins of Empires* (English translation 1795) by Volney, this was one of the four books that Frankenstein's Monster reads to educate himself in the humanist tradition. Nature is gendered as feminine in this dystopia, as is the Plague and the following: fate, earth, dark night, silence, sea, disappointment, love, hope and peril. The Plague is referred to as the companion of spring, of sunshine and of plenty, but she is also the sister of the tornado, the earthquake and the simoon. The Plague does not descend from the heavens like the wrath of God but rises from the entrails of the earth, in the heart of western civilisation, Constantinople, and progresses across the whole planet, devastating all and levelling hierarchies, institutions, governments, religions and so on. Note the gender politics in the following quote, how man/creator/transcendence struggle to signify against woman/destructor/immanence:

Once man was a favourite of the Creator, as the royal psalmist sang, 'God has made him a little lower than the angels, and had crowned him with glory and honour. God made him to have dominion over the works of his hands, and put all things under his feet.' Once it was so; now is man lord of the creation? Look at him – ha! I see plague! She has invested his form, is incarnate in his flesh, has entwined herself with his being, and blinds his heaven-seeking eyes. Lie down, O man, on the flower-strown earth; give up all claim to your inheritance, all you can ever possess of it is the small cell which the dead require. (229-30)

From the womb to the tomb, the male body in the passage above is in a stage of transition, or fall, from transcendentalism to materialism, from power to decay, from signification within the symbolic order to a loss of signification. The male body

becomes infected, marked, inscribed by the Plague and thus is translated over into a thing of abjection. Identity, system and order become disturbed. Boundaries between the self and the not-self become blurred, and '[i]maginary uncanniness and real threat,' which is the abject, beckons him to cross the threshold but ends up engulfing him (Kristeva 4).

In Montserrat Julió's *Memòries d'un futur bàrbar*, the narrator is Joan Garriga, a gynaecologist, a man, therefore, whose life is devoted to birthing. A strange disease, a biological mutation, renders the human race sterile and as a gynaecologist, he is one of the firsts to lose his job. No more children are born. His own life and material well being depend on life reproducing life. Life and death, however, have little meaning for him outside the material. He might be present at the death of a woman in labour in an afternoon's work at the clinic, but this does not prevent him from enjoying himself with friends in the evening (84). It is only when he accidentally comes face to face with the death and decomposition of a male body, and the realisation that the cause of death was suicide, that he is jolted into the recognition of the abject, and with it, his own future death. This recognition is specular and the reaction the cadaver causes in him is disgust, but also a paralysis of the body and a loss of voice:

Damunt d'una plataforma, com una mena de cadafal, voltat de flors seques i empolsinades i d'unes atxes amb el ble cremat fins a la base de ferro que els feia de suport, un cadàver amb la carn consumida i la pell resseca enganxada als ossos, esperava que l'enteressin [...] Un eixam d'insectes voleiava entorn del difunt i les conques dels seus ulls donaven alberg a una nova forma de vida: una bellugadissa de larves i nimfes a punt de rebentar [...]. Encara que estic acostumat a presenciar espectacles repel·lents, en trobar-me, de sobte, cara a cara amb la mort, he intentat cridar, però la veu m'ha sortit ofegada per la por, i les cames, quan he volgut córrer, no m'han obeït [...].³ (144)

3 'On top of a platform which resembled a burial mound, a corpse awaited burial. The flesh was shrunk, the skin wizened. Withered flowers

The utter abjection of the body is the falling body, the cadaver (*cadere*, *caer*: to fall) and, as Julia Kristeva argues, it is at the sight of the cadaver that the viewer recognises what s/he permanently must throw aside in order to live, in order to keep the body clean and pure. It is '[t]hese body fluids, this defilement, this shit' which life tries to separate from itself with great difficulty. 'There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border' (3).

The abject is also present in language when 'non-sense runs through signs and sense,' when language becomes alien, and when the attempt to control signification falters and fails (Kristeva 50). If, 'in the beginning was the word,' it follows that in the end there will be no word. Joan Garriga, the gynaecologist embarks on a process of losing the word and thus his privileged relationship within the symbolic order. He is one of the chosen few to be told the 'secret,' that is, that biologic mutations have made people sterile and that no more children are being born. Not only are the Law of the Father and the *Nom du Père* threatened by destabilisation and a collapse of meaning, but Garriga is too. The boundaries between the 'I' and the 'not I,' between the subject and that which is abject, become blurred. He embarks on a last journey through life taking on different jobs, different places of residence, but his words fail him, first when his partner Laura leaves him because of a lack of communication. She wants a child to make up for the silences in their relationship, but Garriga is also impotent. When his mother dies, Garriga loses all concept of time and order –

covered in dust lay around the platform as well as some iron candlesticks in which only the wicks remained [...] A host of insects fed upon the dead body and the eye sockets accommodated a new form of life: a crawling mass of larvae and pupae which were about to burst [...]. Accustomed as I am to contemplating the repulsive, yet, when I came face to face with death so suddenly, I tried to scream but my voice was strangled by fear, and when I wanted to run, my legs wouldn't carry me' (my translation).

and language. He leaves linear time, with its language based on order and syntax, logic and truth, and enters a space of utter loneliness, and apathy. The death of his mother was his only remaining link with a socio-symbolic network based on genealogy, laws of inheritance, friends, colleagues. As a gynaecologist, used to being present at a baby's first cry in life, and at a mother's tears and laughter, he curiously censors the mothers' and babies' voices in the writing of his memoirs. Displaced from the symbolic, he first attempts to communicate with a spider that has been spinning a web in a tree in front of his window. The metaphor is appropriate because the web is used to trap the fly that unwittingly flies in that direction. He then attempts to imitate the croaking of the frogs and realises that his own words no longer signify. They are little more than a heap of useless expressions and convey emotions that are impossible to decipher (214). Garriga then decides to write his memoirs, first by pencil, then on a typewriter, but the metal letters A, S, T, also fail him and eventually break off and the novel ends with two typewritten pages covered in incomplete words, words with no beginnings or no ends, words with letters missing, words with gaps and silences. Julió deconstructs Garriga's identity by subjecting him to a remorseless alienation process of all that which helped him to signify in the socio-symbolic order: his career, his family, his friends, his body (he limps) and his language. The loss of his mother takes him back to a preverbal stage before language fails him altogether.

Both *The Last Man* and *Memòries d'un futur bàrbar* are written as memoirs, looking backwards to the past and trying to construct a tale which will make sense to a reader of the future. Both novels were written by women using a male narrator who becomes the last human being alive and, although he writes in a present timezone, it is a space devoid of symbolic significance, law and order. In a sense, the future has already arrived, and the apocalypse is inscribed in the silence following the last word at the end of the memoirs. In both novels, Shelley and Julió evoke

the space of the 'fourth dimension' that Christa Wolf refers to, by narrating in a male voice and by deconstructing the power of his discourse, while reconstructing their own power. The narrators of both memoirs panic at the thought that their words will go unread. Lionel Verney, Shelley's last man, declares:

I also will write a book, [...] for whom to read? – to whom dedicated? And then with silly flourish (what so capricious and childish as despair?) I wrote:

DEDICATION
TO THE ILLUSTRIOUS DEAD
SHADOWS, ARISE, AND READ YOUR FALL!
BEHOLD THE HISTORY OF THE
LAST MAN. (339)

Joan Garriga, Julió's last man, similarly tries to justify the writing of his memoirs: 'però em pregunto, a cada instant, per què escric? [...] sí, a més a més de la meua obra, quedaran en el món quilòmetres i quilòmetres de prestatges plens de volums que ningú no tornarà a consultar [...] (61-62).⁴ Shelley's novel actually ends with the words 'The End,' but, as Barbara Johnson argues, where does 'the end' begin? (156-58) And can we actually finish speaking of the end? What comes after the end? Aren't all ends other beginnings? Verney does eventually stop writing, after having left messages for an imagined, and desired, fellow human being, pointing towards the new direction he has taken on his last journey across the earth. The first message is written in the third person singular, the second in the first person, the third is addressed to the readers (see above), who Verney addresses, as if already dead!

The Last Man has now received the attention it deserves by critics who see it as a postmodern text,⁵ or as a text that can

4 'but I ask myself, at each moment, why I write? [...] if, apart from my work there are miles and miles of bookshelves full of volumes that no one will ever look at again [...] (my translation).

5 See Barbara Johnson's 'The Last Man.'

offer a debate on the plague of the twentieth century, AIDS. *Memòries d'un futur bàrbar*, on the other hand, has been slow in obtaining the recognition it deserves, although the situation is now changing, thanks to the excellent article by Geraldine Nichols, 'Species and Speculation in Montserrat Julió's *Memòries d'un futur bàrbar*,' and Lluïsa Astruc's unpublished dissertation which compares Julió's novel with *The Handmaid's Tale*.

If Julió's and Shelley's novels are memoirs of last men, then Haldane's and Burdekin's could be read as tales prophesying the last woman. Both novels were written in the interwar period, 1926 and 1937, at a time when Europe was experiencing a cult of science, of masculinity and a rise of militarism. Charlotte Haldane's *Man's World* depicts a scientific state that controls the manipulation of genes, character formation, and the predetermination of a child's sex. Its defence system uses chemical warfare and the extermination of dissidents through a killing drug called 'Thanatil.' This man's world is white, the scientific state is symbolised by a white Body, Nucleus is its centre, the Brains its governors, and the Ears police the inhabitants for dissidents. The Body does not deny emotion or art, but channels emotion into the framework of motherhood and creative imagination into the Entertainers. Most of the scientific 'advances' in *Man's World* are prophesied by the geneticist, J. B. S. Haldane (who became Charlotte's husband in 1926) in his *Daedalus, or Science and the Future* (1923). On referring to the predetermination of sex, J. B. S. Haldane stated that 'the ideal sex ratio is still a matter of violent discussion, but the modern reaction towards equality is certainly strong' (68). Charlotte Haldane's novel enters the debate at this point. In a scientific state where all the leading scientists are men, who decides what the 'ideal sex ratio' is? The question is rhetorical.

Both *Man's World* and *Swastika Night* are tales about a male dissident on a pilgrimage, searching for truth. Christopher, in Haldane's novel, searches for divine truth, the absolute truth of

God, in a state which has eradicated religion altogether. Alfred, in *Swastika Night*, searches for the truth of the past. He is set on deconstructing the myth of the God Hitler, Nazi supremacy, the Hitlerian Bible, and belief in 'the Blood.' He does not discover truth, but lies. Both novels take the reader on a voyage forwards and backwards in time, but, unlike Shelley's and Julió's last men, Christopher and Alfred are not victims of the apocalypse but dissidents who steer against the currents.

Christopher (a futuristic Christ) does not fit into the scientifically-programmed gender groups, he is defined as 'dominantly abnormal' and 'intermediate sexually,' a man with a 'mystical understanding of the ways of women [which] filled him to the exclusion of passion for them' (87). Attempts to make him think and act like a man fail, because he refuses to have his metabolism interfered with. His homosexuality thus becomes a threat for the status quo. Moreover, the language of the symbolic order does not offer him the space he needs to develop his artistic talents. Moral, social, and alleged obligations – and with them, the language to define them – had been whittled down to an absolute minimum by Mensch, the founder of Nucleus, and his supporters. Christopher tries to transcend his self by escaping from the truth of the scientific state into music, and into a mystical union with God. Paradoxically, he can only do this by taking his own life, by flying a small plane (gendered feminine) without the compulsory supply of oxygen. His flight into eternity ends pathetically, in a style reminiscent of Mary Shelley's mocking lament in *The Last Man*, quoted earlier in this paper:

The 'Makara' continued faithfully to bear her passenger further and further, but ever so slowly a little upward, towards the forbidden heights whence soon she would wrench him, swooping through space, downward and backward, downward and backward – where he belonged. (Haldane, *Man's World* 286-87)

Christopher belongs to a past, but a regressive and backward past. The scientific state has no place for mysticism. As one of the leading scientists, Bruce, says, 'The white race [...] is far too virile for that' (298). The last chapter of the novel, Chapter 13 (a significant number of doom to end with) is titled 'Back to the Future' and the path forward leads to the truth of science. It ends with Bruce, driving Christopher's pregnant sister, Nicolette, back to Nucleus, to the Garden City, where she is to spend the rest of her pregnancy concentrating on masculine traits: courage, individualism, strength of mind, and a will to power. She is Bruce's 'little mother pot,' an empty vessel carrying his seed. The child will be a boy, of course, and the future of man's world will be man's world.

Haldane's novel is very clearly based on a system of dichotomies: masculine/feminine, science/religion, reason/emotion, mind/body – excepting good/evil which have been eradicated through the prohibition of religion. Christopher speaks from a position of difference, and challenges the monological discourses of authority and scientific truth in his art. The future of this man's world looks incredibly bleak, not because religion has been exiled, but because feeling, emotion, pain, and intuition all become divorced from the male body, rendering it inhuman or posthuman.

Burdekin's *Swastika Night* takes gender polarisations one step further, by selecting the very worst of male and female stereotypes and placing them alongside each other: the males in the Nazi regime are militaristic brutes who despise women and illustrate this by exercising their right to rape them. The women are reflections of male desire, they hate themselves, and blindly accept the men's definitions of themselves as 'female animals' and 'hags.' They are herded into cages, which are their living quarters, and it is only during the monthly ceremony in the Holy Hitler Chapel that they are allowed out. The hymn that is sung by all the men and boys in this ceremony refers to the belief

in God the Thunderer, who made this physical earth on which men march in their mortal bodies, and in His Heaven where all heroes are, and in His Son [their] Holy Adolf Hitler, the Only Man. Who was, not begotten, not born of a woman, but Exploded! (5)

In the real Germany, Goebbels and the Nazi ideologues set about the construction of a Germanic myth influenced by Max Nordau's anti-Semitic work, *Degeneration* and the (mis)interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy. This myth is reproduced in the dystopia. Other parallels between the real Nazis and the fictional ones are also to be found, some of them already in existence and others about to happen: the Book Burning, the belief in the Blood, the extermination of the Jews, the displacement of the Christian religion, the reduction of women and the plans to have breeding camps for the Aryan race.

Like Christopher in *Man's World*, Alfred in *Swastika Night* is a rebel. Although he also despises women, he rejects 'the Creed [...], Hitler and the Hitler Book and Germany and the Empire' (29). His German friend, Hermann, believes that these idiosyncrasies have their origin in the fact that he is English and 'Englishmen were funny, informal, queer people altogether' (17). As a technician, Alfred is one of the few who have been allowed to learn to read. On his pilgrimage to see the Sacred Aeroplane in Munich, Alfred is given a secret book by one of the Teutonic Knights, von Hess, which dismantles the myth of Hitler and of women. Together with the book he is given a photograph in which the real Hitler stands beside a real woman. The photograph and the book substitute the myth for historical reality.

As Barthes writes in *Mythologies*, '[m]yth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification [...]' (143). By deconstructing the myth and by looking for the silences surrounding the myth, Alfred eventually finds that the truth lies in women. Nietzsche

suggests in *The Gay Science* (first published in German, 1887) that '[p]erhaps truth is a woman who has reasons for not letting us see her reasons.' Nietzsche names truth. She is Baubô from the Greeks (38). What these reasons are will never be known, say both Alfred and Nietzsche, for women do not exist, they only exist in so far as they are 'a reflection of men's wishes' (Burdekin 105) or because 'it is man who creates for himself the image of woman, and woman forms herself according to this image' (Nietzsche 126). For Keith Ansell-Pearson, the fact that Nietzsche locates truth in Baubô means that he also locates it in the female reproductive organs and the eternal cycle of creation, preservation and destruction (39). Alfred's mentor, von Hess, admits that 'there may be some obscure physical reason as to why girls are not being born in the proper quantity' (Burdekin 104) and Alfred learns, reluctantly at first, that by allowing women space to develop their selves and their pride, the revolution might be bloodless and thus, more effective.

Nietzsche claimed that the superior man, or 'Übermensch,' who could overcome his own weaknesses in his struggle for the will to power, would be the man of the future. Women could never attain the status of superior woman because where 'Will is the manner of men; willingness [is] that of women' (126). Apart from women, Nietzsche also names Christians, shopkeepers, Englishmen, democrats, and cows, as all those who could never attain the heights of the Übermensch. Alfred is an Englishman; he embarks on a journey to discover democracy, and is helped by outlawed Christians. The Nazi Knight, von Hess, trusts him with 'the secret' that he and his ancestors have kept through the centuries, and orders him to found a 'truth society,' while carefully instructing him to warn its members 'against accepting violence as a noble, manly thing' (131). Power, Alfred learns, comes with knowledge, not with violence, for 'weak men cannot bear knowledge' (65).

It is curious that Katherine Burdekin hid behind a mask of her own when she had her antifascist novel published under the

pseudonym Murray Constantine in 1937. In 1940 the novel was issued in Victor Gollancz's Left Book Club with a 'Publisher's Note,' which not only demanded that the novel be read according to an established truth, but also displaced the authority of the author by continuing to 'lie' about her true name and her sex. The note ran:

In reissuing this novel the publishers wish to say:

1. It was written and published in 1937.
2. The picture painted must be considered symbolic rather than prophetic – symbolic of what would happen to the world if Hitler were to impose his will (as he must not) upon it.
3. While the author has not in the least changed his opinion that the Nazi idea is evil, and that we must fight the Nazis on land, at sea, in the air and in ourselves, he has changed his mind about the Nazi *power* to make the *world* evil. He feels that, while the material destruction and misery they can and have brought about are immense, they cannot do spiritual harm even in the short run; for they can communicate the disease only to anyone who has the tendency to take it. He further feels that Nazism is too bad to be permanent, and that the appalling upheaval through which the world is passing is a symbol of birth, and that out of it will emerge a higher stage of humanity.

It is curious that this 'Publishers' Note' was thought to be essential and I doubt whether Burdekin was involved in the writing of it. The Left Book Club surely did not consist of naïve readers. Moreover, the fact that Burdekin sets out, through Alfred, to deconstruct the myth of a Teutonic past based on the glorification of Blood and violence, and has Alfred succeed in destabilising the myth, is not taken into account by the Publishers. Finally, the Cassandra-like voice she adopts in illustrating that the blind submission of women to male desire is 'the tragedy of the human race,' is ignored. The gender-blind publishers did not 'read' *Swastika Night* in this way, in spite of the fact that it is a woman who depicts a man's world, with men's words, and women's silences.

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‘History Is Not a Thing of the Past’: The Theory and Practice of Historical Discourse in Alasdair Gray’s *A History Maker*

The status of history as infallible science and object of empirical study has been one of the key issues questioned incessantly within circles of postmodern debate. In fact, a great many literary critics, philosophers and theoreticians have been concerned lately with what they have agreed in calling ‘the crisis of historicity,’ ‘posthistory,’ or even ‘the crisis of representational time.’ It is interesting to note, however, that this affair of deauthorizing history as *the* master narrative of Western discourse *par excellence*, or even its metanarrative, is not new (Ermath 20). Although it seems easy at first sight to trace some of these assumptions in the work of contemporary writers who tend to postulate in their fiction the end of a Hegelian understanding of history, as the ‘dialectic interplay of opposing forces’ (Heise 17), the act of looking back to earlier examples may be also rewarding.

Perhaps one of the most striking precedents is that of George Orwell, who, in his production was particularly attentive to the potential manipulation of history as an effective means to exercise power over others. Specifically, Orwell insisted on the status of history as a palimpsest and on the importance of historical writing and of the artifices of historical records themselves. Late postmodernist authors, like the Scottish novelist and short-story writer Alasdair Gray, have recovered the legacy of previous dystopian writers like Orwell, and have exploited this new vision of history as the ‘true’ postmodern

concern. In *A History Maker* (1994), Gray offers the memoirs of a Scottish hero living in the twenty-third century, Wat Dryhope, whose life makes prospective readers reflect on the cyclical nature of history. On the one hand, we are led to think over the ways of collecting historical data and of 'staging' history in Gray's future militaristic society. On the other side, Dryhope's story reveals itself as another palimpsest, firstly because the day-to-day of the Ettrick warriors, based on military games, reproduces satirically the old state of things, and also because the elaboration and further transmission of the narrative is made in a fragmented and composite way.

Furthermore, the memoirs of Gray's anti-hero will bring forth in the first place the great paradox behind postmodern accounts of history and narrative that critics like Linda Hutcheon have circumscribed to the return to historical narratives in the age of posthistory (88). In *A History Maker*, Gray never questions the validity of the discipline, but distrusts the claims to truth and objectivity customarily made by history. Ironically, as in many of his previous works he does so at the expense of discrediting the main elements of historical discourse, namely, the authenticity and accuracy of historical topics and facts, the status of the chroniclers and of the protagonists of historical events, the time co-ordinates, and even the legitimacy of historical texts themselves. As for place, in Gray's novel, as much as in most works by Orwell, the eye of the historian focuses on a specific setting, since both authors seem to support the belief that the narrated events could not take place anywhere else: Scotland and England, respectively. Without forgetting about their existence in a globalised world, their fiction evinces the political debate of the Scotland Question in *A History Maker*, and the weight of England and things English especially in Orwell's essays. Indeed, particularly in Gray's narrative, and following Orwell's example, it will be seen how, although he shows his reticence towards a dialectics

of time by means of parody, a dialectics of space, fostered by nationalism, is ever-present in the novel.

I. The Theory of Historical Discourse: Fictional Paradoxes

As hinted above, one of the side effects of the present state of things in the age of scientific progress and technology has been the examination of history, both as discipline of study and as a means of accounting for the past. Its basic grounds are nowadays endlessly contested, from the concepts of 'history' and 'posthistory,' to the constituents of historical discourse, and finally, to the ultimate consequences of the demise of history. By way of example, in *Chronoschisms* Ursula Heise emphasises the idea of closure and ending implied by the term 'posthistory,' when she underlies its hyperbolic character and its relation to apocalypse and 'cataclysm,' even when denying the relevance of definite endings to it (30). As for the implications of the crisis of historicity, Heise exposes two contrasting approaches: one from which the end of traditional history apparently disavows any attempts at political practice and action, and another one which envisages it as a move towards freedom from totalising readings of the past (27).

Linda Hutcheon seems to privilege a more progressive view of the term when she invokes the paradoxical interdependence between the aftermath of history and the overwhelming number of historical narratives published every year. Thus she portrays the situation in a quite positive light: 'There seems to be a new desire to think historically, and to think historically these days is to think critically and contextually' (88). A similar progressive stance is shared by Elizabeth Ermath, who, by referring to 'historical time,' restricts its scope to 'thing[s] of the past' (25). According to this view, the end of history implies a liberation from the narratives of the

past. On the other hand, the acceptance of historical time as fictitious may be regarded as a success: 'a triumph of collective awareness, literally collective consciousness that creates and sustains itself' (Ermath 30).

The events of the past are not the objects of this revision of historicity, but the ways in which historians choose to reproduce them. As Hutcheon claims, following Hayden White, there is no scepticism against the *facts*, but against the means to have access to the past, since our historical knowledge is always limited (99). Not only that, the task of the historian is also reassessed, and their role and function delineated afresh: 'To be a historian then is to accept the destiny of the spurned lover – to write, photograph, film, televise, archive, and simulate the past not merely as its memory bank but as binding oneself by *a promise to the dead to tell the truth about the past*' (Wyschogrod xi; my emphasis). According to this definition, the would-be historian should not only reproduce past events, but also fabricate those events. The work of the new historian, in their commitment to tell *the* truth, intrudes at those times into the field of ethics. Though again, it is not the status of truth that is being questioned, but the criteria employed in the collection of data, the compilation of historical material and its further presentation to the community (Wyschogrod 2).

Crucial to this is the changing understanding of time as historical category. The influence of communication and information technologies has been instrumental to alter the Hegelian perception of time, based on dialectics in which the present is dependent on the future to be fully realised, and essential to assess the past. The move towards a non-linear, partial and composite vision of history corresponds to a new construction of temporality that rejects static notions and embraces a 'swinging' one instead, that Elizabeth Ermath, for example, calls 'rhythmic time' (14). This temporal uncertainty is best realised in fiction, the medium through which most concerns regarding the transformation of history have been

conveyed. From a conventional viewpoint, history and the novel have depended on one another. Like historical time, narrative time has been considered a progression from a beginning to an end, usually heading towards death, which is transcended through the act of reading (Heise 48). It is precisely by means of narrative reconstruction that many historical truisms have been put to the test.

II. Orwell's View of History

A recurrent feature in George Orwell's production is his awareness of history. Already in his early works, he showed his rejection of imperialistic discourses and his abhorrence of class prejudices. More specifically in examples like *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), *Animal Farm* (1945), and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), Orwell examined contemporary politics and reflected on the 'fictiveness' of history. Furthermore, he seemed to focus on the (post)modern paradox touched on above, since at the same time that he acknowledged the end of history, the reflection on the discipline was never absent from his work.

From his position of eyewitness and protagonist of many of the events he reproduced in his narrative, Orwell manifested that history had come to its demise. As Cairns Craig explains in relation to his standpoint, '[it] was not that events had ceased to occur, but that the possibility of analysing and understanding the past, of *writing* history, had been destroyed; and that therefore the sense of living within the process of history had been lost' (120). Specifically, Orwell's experience during the Spanish Civil War made him contend that history had stopped short in 1936. Yet the crisis of historicity that affected him in those years, and that would be aggravated after World War II, was not foreign to some of his contemporaries and to a whole generation of anglophone writers after him, Alasdair Gray amongst them.

Orwell's realisation of the disappearance of history stemmed from his perception of the changing conception of historical time. From a very postmodern perspective, he admitted that the past could not be fully known, and that historical records and narratives were always defective and incomplete. Except in a totalitarian reading of history, as he underlined in 'The Prevention of Literature' (1946), there was no possibility to control the past:

From the totalitarian point of view *history is something to be created rather than learned*. A totalitarian state is in effect a theocracy, and its ruling caste, in order to keep its position, has to be thought of as infallible. But since, in practice, no one is infallible, it is frequently necessary to rearrange past events in order to show that this or that mistake was not made, or that this or that imaginary triumph actually happened. Then, again, every major change in policy demands a corresponding change of doctrine and a revaluation of prominent historical figures. [...] Totalitarianism demands, in fact, the continuous alteration of the past, and in the long run probably demands a disbelief in the very existence of objective truth. (*Inside the Whale* 164; my emphasis)

Obviously, while writing these words Orwell had in mind his satirical fairy tale *Animal Farm*, but also his project in store, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. As he had made explicit in these works, history consisted of a continuous struggle between two parties: those who held power and those who yearned for it. As a result of that conflict, the winners were always in charge of writing and rewriting history in a totalitarian fashion.¹ This is one of Napoleon's obsessions in *Animal Farm*, once Snowball is ostracised and he becomes the only leader of the animals' revolution: he is responsible, then, for the gradual change of the

1 Orwell's capital awareness of history has been of great use to later writers, like the Canadian Margaret Atwood who, in her dystopian fiction *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), presents the effects of a theocratical and highly militaristic regime on Gileadean citizens. In Atwood's totalitarian utopia all evidence of the past is banned from public and individual memory in tragic ways.

original Seven Commandments, and as a consequence for the manipulation of collective memories.

Orwell exploited the same idea again in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, although the perspective he offered this time was Winston Smith's, one of the actual forgers of public history in charge of destroying written evidence and creating new records, in obedience to the Party's wish to keep dissenters under control. Yet in Orwell's dystopia there are not only 'professional' historians of the here and now like Winston, but the function of chronicler is also played significantly by telescreens – much like the public eyes in *A History Maker*, as we will see – which record day and night the lives of Oceania's citizens. In Big Brother's utopia, individual memories, and not only public history, become the object of the state's manipulation. That is the reason why Winston cannot invoke at will his memories belonging to the pre-revolutionary period, and these only return in his dreams (31).

Orwell considered war as a recurrent event in human history, and thus it often appears in his production. Yet the concept of war he promotes is quite an unromantic one, and most times is uttered in paradoxical terms, as the notion of 'doublethink' exposes. Already in 'Politics and the English Language,' he denounced the manipulation of language exercised by state politics, according to which the killing of civilians in wartime was usually read as a strategy of 'pacification' (*Inside the Whale* 153). A similar device, and also with a satirical purpose, operates in Gray's narrative, especially as regards warfare regulations in the hero's militaristic society. Along with the representation of war, Orwell demystifies the elusive figure of the enemy, which he evaluates in his oft-quoted essay 'England Your England' (1941):

They do not feel any enmity against me as an individual, nor I against them. They are 'only doing their duty,' as the saying goes. Most of them, I have no doubt, are kind-hearted, law-abiding men who would never dream of committing murder in private life. On the other

hand, if one of them succeeds in blowing me to pieces with a well-placed bomb, he will never sleep any the worse for it. He is serving his country, which has the power to absolve him from evil. (*Inside the Whale* 63)

In *Homage to Catalonia* it is Orwell, the eyewitness in the guise of reporter, who chronicles his experiences of things Spanish during the Civil War. *Homage to Catalonia* offers a disenchanted view of war, similar in certain respects to the one defended by Wat Dryhope in Gray's novel: 'War, to me, meant roaring projectiles and skipping shards of steel; above all it meant mud, lice, hunger, and cold. It is curious, but I dreaded the cold much more than I dreaded the enemy' (18). Also in the same work, Orwell concentrates on demystifying the figure of the enemy. He particularly recalls an occasion on which he stood face to face to some deserters, the first 'real' Fascists he had ever seen, and was struck by the impossibility to distinguish them from the militia men (16).

As elaborate as this are the versions of the enemy presented in both *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where Orwell highlighted once more the ambiguous nature of this figure. Together with explicit criticisms made on war, the changing personality of the so-called 'enemy' is brought to the fore. In the first narrative, for example, Snowball is first appointed 'Animal Hero, First Class,' and then demoted to traitor to the Republic of Animals, and Napoleon sides alternately with farmers Pilkington and Frederick, although they had formerly declared war on human beings (9). In the second novel, Oceania also befriends Eastasia and Eurasia in turns, depending on the flows and ebbs of world economy, and each time textual evidence has to be subsequently rewritten, and the efficiency of propaganda invoked (161-ff). On those frequent occasions, Napoleon and the Party appeal to their people's patriotism and nationalistic spirit, also reinforced by means of public exhibitions of authority and might, using Orwell's own words in 'England Your England,' by 'parading' power (*Inside the*

Whale 69).² Demonstrations of ‘naked power’ such as this one will reappear in *A History Maker*, enacted by both the Ettrick and Northumbrian sides. Especially the members of the former clan will have to show their scars with pride, to make up for the absence of victories, the lack of medals and the loss of standards.

As stated above, Orwell’s faith in England and his belief in national identity were inseparable from his consideration of the past, and thus of history, as a continuum. When looked at closely, his nationalism provokes, however, mixed feelings. On the one hand, as it is made clear in ‘England Your England,’ he defended a romantic view of patriotism and national specificity, recollecting with nostalgia some popular features traditionally associated to the English character (*Inside the Whale* 66). In the same line, the preservation of England’s idiosyncrasy and the historical progress of the country are seen as dependent on common people’s efforts to self-improvement. He deeply regrets, on the contrary, the manipulation of well-meaning collectives made by totalitarian regimes like Fascism and Nazism in the name of national pride. In the end, though he opens the door to optimism in a better future – ‘*if there is still hope [...] it lies in the proles,*’ as Winston wrote in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (72) –, Orwell’s stance shows some inconsistencies, as the writer and critic Caryl Phillips contends, since in trying to preserve Englishness he sees the need to protect his country from foreign ‘intrusions’:

Orwell was merely restating what most British people *wanted* to believe. That their traditions, hobbies and pastimes – their culture if you will – was not only deeply rooted in a continuous historical past, but was impervious to pollution from foreign sources. (108)

2 Orwell’s treatment of patriotism contrasted with other contemporary manifestations like Winston Churchill’s, who, in his war speeches to the nation, harangued the English to achieve ‘victory at all costs’ as the only way to retain British supremacy – and thus, British ancestral idiosyncrasy – (Guiles and Middleton 130).

Phillips interprets Orwell's nationalistic impulses as a proof of the British obsession for circumscribing identity to either/or terms, precisely the kind of definition that Alasdair Gray rejects in *A History Maker*.

III. Discursive Practices: Alasdair Gray's *A History Maker*

Alasdair Gray belongs to the proles, his working-class origin being precisely one of the distinctive features of his fiction. Actually the relatively recent success of his works is due, at least in part, to the innovative point of view presiding the narrative: that of the Scottish working class, as opposed to the former values of rural and small-town Scotland promoted by earlier writers (Harvey 78). Moreover, not only his personal connection with leftist circles, and his Marxist views, but also his inclination for post-industrial towns like Glasgow, the real and imaginary setting for most of his novels, explain as well his particular interest for the historical. Already in *Lanark* (1981), his first novel, Gray offered a narrative in which novel and epic mingled with an almost total disregard for any sense of developmental time (Craig 35).³ The very disposition of the text – *Lanark: A Life in 4 Books* is structured seemingly at random from Books Three to Four, with a Prologue, Book One, an Interlude, and Book Two in between – speaks of his coming to terms with a new way of telling history altogether.

In this sense, one of the most effective strategies he puts to effect is the return to the past, as he does in *Poor Things* (1992), which has been defined as 'a complex anti-Victorian artefact' (Marín 28; my translation from the Spanish original). In this novel he recovers the dawn of scientific progress, through

3 For a comprehensive account of Alasdair Gray's biography and early literary career, see Bruce Charlton's article "The Story So Far."

the Frankenstein-like creation of Bella Baxter. This return to the past is constantly related to the present time, particularly because the narrative is presented as an edition made by a Glasgow local historian of the memoirs of one of the protagonists. This willing act of meditation upon the past, which will emerge especially in *A History Maker*, matches Hutcheon's vision of the postmodern novel: 'Postmodern fiction suggests that to re-write or to re-present the past in fiction and in history is, in both cases, to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological' (110). This is with all probability one of the main purposes in the novel under analysis, in which the sense of correlation and mutual influence of historical writing and the historical novel never abandons the narrative. Henceforth Gray's particular use of historical discourse will be discussed, along with his assessment of the demise of the discipline in the age of post-history, as he emphasises in the novel once and again.

For a writer who is said to conceive the novel as a living genre, in spite of his many postmodern traits, 'someone who perpetuates the novel tradition of making the novel novel' (Axelrod, 'Alasdair Gray' 103), a foray into science fiction opens new possibilities. The irony behind Gray's adoption of the genre in *A History Maker* consists exactly not just in his presentation of the foibles of contemporary society, as most science-fiction novels do, but it lies peculiarly in the fact that twenty-third-century Great Britain has returned to a pre-historic origin. Especially the Ettrick society, under close view, has reproduced a democratic matriarchal system in which, on the one hand, women supervise the well-being of the community and perform two main tasks, reproduction and 'post-production,' or the regeneration of wounded and maimed soldiers, aided by the high technology of powerplants. On the other hand, men engage in the meantime in the 'noble art' of war against their historical enemies, the Northumbrians. After a bloody battle in which the Ettrick warriors are outnumbered and almost

decimated by their opponents, a new heroic messiah comes to the fore, Wat Dryhope, in fact one of the last survivors, whose seven days of glory as the improvised leader of Ettrick are reported in his memoirs. As Gray remarked about another of his heroes, Lanark, Dryhope is also in a quest 'to find more love and sunlight' (Axelrod, 'An Epistolary Interview' 107), during which he will encounter some of the most important female figures from his childhood – his mother Kittock, Nan, one of the aunts that comforts him in times of trouble, and his sister and lover Meg Mountbenger, also known as Delilah Puddock –, a number of crucial encounters which end with Wat and Meg living as gangrels or vagabonds.

As stated above, Gray chooses on this occasion the form of a pseudo-historical novel with science-fiction undertones to analyse the basic categories of historical writing: from the role of the historian, to the topics of traditional historical narratives and the new concept of time, to conclude with the debatable status of historical texts themselves. Perhaps in the first category Gray's use of postmodern devices is most revealing. He does not opt for either of the two possibilities that Linda Hutcheon suggests in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*: an at-all-times controlling narrator, or a plurality of voices (117). In *A History Maker* it is mainly Kittock, the henwife – one of the figures of authority within the community – and the hero's mother and mentor, who has been in charge of keeping and editing Wat's memoirs. In her 'Prologue by a Hero's Mother,' she lists the main features of traditional historical writing, in spite of which her narrative, or Wat's for that matter, is not made the more objective:

Wat Dryhope, like Julius Caesar describing his Gallic wars, avoids vainglory and self-pity by naming himself in the third person and keeping the tale factual. He also writes so cannily that, like Walter Scott in his best novels, he gives the reader a sense of being at mighty doings. (xi)

Anyhow, she asks at other times in her Prologue for reliability, claiming that the truth of the events is not her own, but that most facts can be checked in archives and public eye records. It seems funny, nonetheless, that there do not exist records whatsoever of the capital event that sets the narrative in motion: the initial battle between Ettrick and Northumbria, which disowns the rest of the narrative, in so far as it relies on the good-will of the audience. Oddly enough, at the same time that she tries to ground her authority as reliable narrator, Kittock deauthorises 'apocryphal' versions of the historical account as Meg Mountbenger's might be: 'If still alive Meg is sixty-three. Should she reappear and deny Wat's story let none believe her. She was always a perverse bitch. She was the first of my gets but I never liked her' (xiii).

By means of Kittock's taking the floor in the Prologue, Wat Dryhope's distance from the audience is irremediably widened, and his memoirs turned into a different genre: from autobiography to biography. More interesting seems, though, the function played by technology in the chronicle of historical records. The public eyes, reminiscent of the telescreens of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, document and even comment facts as they come about, with the result that their narrative becomes more fictitious. Their presence and criticism in the novel speaks, on the one hand, of the abuses of mass media on privacy and individuality in contemporary society, and, on the other hand, of the one-sided versions that those seemingly 'objective' media usually provide. Gray devotes a whole chapter in the novel to the influence of the public eye in Wat's technology and information world. The biased description of the two armies when the battle is about to start is very telling:

The public eye hangs close to his left shoulder. The boy blushes in embarrassment and hones on, pretending not to see until the voice says, 'An Ettrick breakfast – not very nourishing.' The boy strikes at the eye with the stone and topples forward on his face. 'A typical reaction,' says the eye, skipping sideways and leaving him in darkness,

‘From one of a hot-headed clan on the verge of extinction. Let us see Northumbria.’ [...] ‘There is an atmosphere of anticipation,’ says the public eye. ‘But anticipation without anxiety, of anticipation tinged with (let us be frank) pleasure. For half a century these doughty Northumbrians have lost brothers, fathers and uncles to Ettrick, so where you and I see the one surviving clan of a gallant Border army the Northumbrians see – and who can blame them? – the remnant of a nest of vipers.’ (2-3)

As for the matter of historical account, *A History Maker* centres on war, patriotism and the figure of the hero, all of them fit topics for an epic. The essential conflict is the one already mentioned between Scottish and English warriors, whose only purpose in life is to preserve their respective standards from the enemy’s reach. Ironically, perhaps due to the influence of Orwellian doublethink, military confrontations are regulated by the Geneva Conventions which both sides respect, and according to which the aim of warfare is not to beat the opponent, but ‘to show human contempt of pain and annihilation’ (70). Although they refer to themselves as people belonging to a post-historical period – since historical times seem to be associated to barbarism – their utmost concern is to save face for future generations, as General Craig Douglas, the representative of the old-fashioned heroism of the Braveheart kind, implies in his speech to his young and diminished troops:

‘Have we become so sensible – so comfortable – so *unmanly* that we can bask like lions in the sunlight of victory but flee like hens from the shadow of certain death? A heroic defeat makes brave men as glorious as a victory I think! [...] ‘I ask you to die with me so that our death will be viewed and viewed again to the last days of mankind and television and time! Is anybody with me?’ (9-10)

Craig Douglas’s counterpart is played by his son Wat Dryhope, an anti-hero who rejects the ethics of honour and fame, and strives to preserve his life and that of his people in the midst of the irrationality of battle. The very name of the new postmodern hero – a character with ‘an ex-centric status’ in

Hutcheon's words (114) – hints at the paradox behind his appointment as leader of Ettrick by the warriors left after 'The Battle of the Century,' as the public eye put it. In his role of national hero, Wat will have to make public appearances and speeches, in which he will try to eradicate the outdated patriotic feelings that still pervade the posthistorical era. At those times he preaches against the education of all men into soldiers, and about the importance of fostering special talents:

Men become soldiers, Archie Crook Cot, because we're no good at anything else! The Crook Cots are teachers, wizards, gurus in the mandarin network! [...] Why should anyone with an ounce of intellectual talent train for a life of grievous bodily harm?' (88-89).

In spite of his efforts, Wat's fight in the novel is one against the customary values associated to masculinity, which affects many other Gray's heroes (Galloway 196). Not only that, his struggle is also that of the individual against the structures that enclose his life, an entrapment for which he will have to find an 'emergency exit,' as it usually happens to Gray's protagonists (Lumsden 116; Harvey 82). At the beginning of his *bildungsroman* Wat wishes to escape with Annie and try an old way of living that resembles Winston and Julia's secret meetings at the junk-shop in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: to ride to the north and play the monogamous couple, far from any sort of civilisation (*History Maker* 52). In the middle of his adventure he isolates himself from the community, taking the commander's apartment, since 'privacy and power' seem to go together (93), and at the end of the process he finally gets his hoped-for independence, as the rhyme in the postscript shows: 'O Wat was a nasty old tinker,/ And Meg was his nasty old wife,/ They hated none more than each other,/ They lived in contention and strife' (221).

Although progress is often invoked in *A History Maker* when referring to the present state of things, Gray's picture of the twenty-third century amounts in many respects to a journey back to the sources. The view of contemporary warfare as less

primitive than in 'the old historical times' previously mentioned, is but an example, and so it goes with the dangerous situation their so-called 'rational utopia' is going through, almost doomed to disappear by an infection Wat himself would transmit, and which could bring back old patriarchy, especially to 'bellicose countries' like Japan, Germany, France, the United States and Great Britain (131). Once more a woman, Kittock, provides the antidote for the virus Meg-Delilah had spread, thus revealing the enormous influence of female guidance in this community: 'Among settled people it's the great-grannies who stop these things becoming dangerous. Their gossip has been the only government and police the world has needed for more than a century – if you're ignorant of that then you don't know what keeps modern society stable' (151). This female folk vision of the past as the inexhaustible reception of popular memories, as opposed to the historical account of heroic events, is one of the key perceptions in Gray's novel regarding historical time.

In addition, the cyclical pattern is reinforced, not only by this female genealogy, but also, as pointed out above, by means of a futuristic society that has gone backwards in many respects, mainly owing to technological excesses. In the future Gray presents, human beings have reached the stars and have achieved immortality, but there is a price to be paid: the loss of one's memories. Gray's association of mortality to the past is not new in *A History Maker*, and appeared already in *Poor Things*, where, although Bella Baxter had been brought back to life, all memories had been erased from her implanted brain. The same idea haunts Wat's thoughts:

The main difference between *neo-sapience* and *proto-sapience* (that is what immortals call themselves and us) is, that the longer neo-sapiences live the more they know of their future, the longer we live the more we know of our past. Groombridge said mortals cling harder to the past as they age, so our lives have a tragic sweetness neo-sapience lacks, a painful sweetness got from memories of lost childhood, lost love, lost friends, lost opportunities, lost beauty et cetera – lost *life*, in other words. (*History Maker* 45)

But definitely faith in progress is undermined in Kittock's 'Notes Explaining Obscurities,' which, on the one hand, defy narrative time – since there are questions which will not be answered till the very last page – and, on the other side, give an account of human progress so to say, starting from prehistorical times, to Postmodernism – the period of 'the end of history' (203) –, and ending with modernism, or the time of intelligence networks and post-industrialisation.

IV. Conclusions

The end of history comes for both George Orwell and Alasdair Gray with the destruction of textual evidence and the subsequent loss of memories, and not only collective but also personal ones. Although sharing common views about the purposes of the discipline, the unreliability of its chroniclers, their perception of time as non-linear, but rhythmic and cyclical, and above all, the deceitful nature of historical texts, they also differ in some respects. Orwell's understanding of history is the product of a time of traumatic and decisive changes, in the light of which he tries to induce the younger generations to benefit from the achievements of their elders, in the first place, and then to continue overcoming any obstacles to social equality. In Gray's project a new sense of history is promoted. In spite of setting his novel in a posthistorical period, much like Orwell does in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, he never abandons completely the historical perspective, and warns instead against the dangers of an old-fashioned patriotism for human progress. Actually, their stances on nationalistic concerns are slightly different as well. Orwell's England yearns for retaining the sense of its glorious past, and cannot encompass the shifting reality of the interwar and post-war years. On the contrary, and despite the historical absences of Scotland in relation to England that Gray acknowledges and abhors, he moves towards a more enriching

notion of the Scottish nation, manifested in his sheer rejection of totalitarian regimes, and of either/or associations of the kind native/foreign, self/other, and I/the enemy, no matter the standard they fight for: that is the point when banners with golden eagles are seen as poles with tin chickens on top (*History Maker* 32).

In a world in which nationalistic strife has replaced class struggle, Gray's hope lies in the quotidian, the popular – though still differentiating Scott's nationalistic ballads (*History Maker* 61) from the gangrels' ones –, and in the practical view of life, embodied in *A History Maker* by a whole female community of grandmothers, aunts, nieces, mothers and sisters. In fact, in his way towards maturity, Wat learns about himself through different women, who embody the opposite principles to the manly virtues delineated above: especially the capacity for nurture and care, for sensible and egalitarian government, and their role as educators and repositories of knowledge. This gender awareness is absent, however, from Orwell's work, whose attention is focused on male ethics and values almost exclusively. But in Gray's fiction hope lies above all in the individual, Wat Dryhope in this case, whose decisions need not be heroic, and whose gains and losses are his own, not his family's, not Scotland's. From that position, history cannot be longer used to exercise power over others, and thus becomes harmless and devoid of negative connotations.

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The Satiric and Dystopic Legacy of George Orwell in Robert Harris's *Fatherland*

George Orwell's literary production has been often associated with satire and dystopianism – especially in his last two novels – being, for this reason, repeatedly acknowledged as one of the most gifted satirists of all times. Needless to say, the success achieved by *Burmese Days* (1934), *Coming Up for Air* (1939), *Animal Farm* (1945) or *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) proves the extent to which the dystopic and satirical components of his late fiction have widely attracted critics and readers. It seems that the influence exerted by his novels and thought on some contemporary writers can be a very appropriate way of approaching the English author from more ample and thoroughgoing perspectives. In this vein, the publication of dystopic accounts has been lately revitalised by the emergence of a group of novelists – i.e., Julian Barnes, Ben Elton, Robert Harris or James Lovegrove – who are retaking the patterns Orwell employed, especially in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Orwell, thus, arises as a kind of linking bridge between the early dystopic production of the Russian Yevgeni Zamyatin, the British Malcolm Muggeridge, Harold Nicholson, C. P. Snow and Hilaire Belloc, and recent novels such as Julian Barnes's *England, England* (1998), Ben Elton's *Gridlock* (1991), Robert Harris's *Fatherland* (1992) and *Archangel* (1998), James Lovegrove's *Days* (1997) and Fay Weldon's *Darcy's Utopia* (1990), among others.¹

1 For further references on the antecedents of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, see Andy Croft's article 'Worlds Without End Foisted Upon the Future – Some Antecedents on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*' (1984).

The Orwellian presence in these authors echoes quite substantially the influence, openly recognised by Orwell, that Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and Zamyatin's *We* (1920) exercised on the posterior writing of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.² This background somehow aims at proving that the importance of this novelist, essayist and journalist does not only reside in the aesthetic quality of his literary production but also in the followers that have been captured by his fiction. Consequently, the basic goal of this paper will focus on the examination of Orwell's dystopic and satiric legacy in Robert Harris's *Fatherland*, a novel that is built on the basis of what would have happened had the Germans won the Second World War. In this analysis, I will mainly centre on some of the aspects that more recurrently emerge in dystopic literature and which can be appreciated in both *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Fatherland*. The alteration of the past and the distortion of history, the manipulation of language in the bureaucratic spheres and the various repressive mechanisms at the disposal of dictatorships will constitute some of the issues this study will essentially explore.

As I pointed out above, these two novels are embedded in a long-standing tradition of twentieth-century dystopic literature, which flourished in the first decades of this century and reached its heyday in the inter-war period. In a time of massive industrialisation, of constant war-threats and of a visible political, economic and cultural crisis, many authors, with especial emphasis on George Orwell and Aldous Huxley, began to fictionalise this suffocating reality in their works. As Krishan Kumar explains, what these authors intended to transmit was the feeling of fear, uneasiness and anxiety that reigned among citizens after the armistice of the First World War was signed (388-89). The rumours about the possibilities of

2 In his very interesting article, Joseph Menzciems alludes to the Swiftian components that can be noticed in Orwell's dystopic production. Menzciems mentions Orwell's fascination when he read Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* at the age of eight (91).

employing nuclear weapons in future wars, the increasing rate of unemployment and the emergence of totalitarian regimes in many European countries led many authors to paint a decadent and pessimistic world in their novels.

One of the innovations these dystopic accounts incorporated was that the action mostly developed in future scenarios or in distant countries. The necessity of being detached and of withdrawing from the present time stimulated writers to locate their stories in places such as Butler's 'Erewhon,' Huxley's terrifying 'Brave New World' or Orwell's jeopardising 'Oceania.' Keith Booker suggests the 'principal literary strategy of dystopian literature to be defamiliarization: by focusing their critiques of society on imaginatively distant settings, dystopian fictions provide fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural and inevitable' (3-4). Furthermore, with the conscious distancing of the action, the dystopic work unquestionably enhances its satirical insight, in the sense that the satirist can more easily denounce the vices and follies of the present time if the action is set in the future.³

Satire and dystopia have been traditional allies in the struggle against social and political abuses. This combination finds its most brilliant expression in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm*, two novels that, in spite of the author's occasional blind idealism, exhibit his outstanding command of most satirical strategies, particularly irony, indirection, use of animal imagery and grotesque or scatological situations.⁴ It

3 In her book *Satiric Allegory: Mirror of Man* (1956), Ellen Douglass Leyburn elaborates on the role satire has traditionally performed in works that take place in futuristic societies. She devotes part of this chapter to a thought-provoking discussion on Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, presented as one of the epitomes of modern satiric dystopias.

4 Among other critics, Alberto Lázaro has analysed the function of satire in Orwell's works in his book *Pensamiento y Obra de George Orwell* (1987). He alludes to irony and the use of animal imagery as the two rhetorical

seems that Robert Harris's *Fatherland* inherits some of the traits that characterise *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s inherent satiric and dystopic dimension. The central target of his satire is, as in Orwell's novel, the totalitarian establishments that regimented Europe during the Second World War. It is no wonder, thus, that the first parallelism we can notice in both is that they do not centralise their satiric attacks exclusively on Stalin's Communist Russia, Mussolini's Fascist Italy or Hitler's Nazi Germany. The achievement of the two novels is that their criticism embraces any expression of totalitarianism, in whatever country it may take place.⁵ In his article 'Conjuring Leviathan: Orwell on the State' Stuart Hall quotes Orwell's words taken from one of his interventions in the BBC radio programme he conducted: 'In his BBC broadcast "Literature and Totalitarianism," Orwell remarked that "When one mentions totalitarianism one thinks immediately of Germany, Russia, Italy, but I think one must face the risk that this phenomenon is going to be world-wide"' (229). The visionary viewpoints Orwell poses in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* accord very much with the previous words, and can also be perceived in Harris's *Fatherland*. Although the interpretation of the latter seems to be obvious and the targets patent, the reader should not be misled by this apparent clarity in its argument. This

strategies that contribute more decisively to empower the overall satiric effect of some of his novels (172-81).

- 5 In this respect, it could be worthwhile noting that Orwell's deep disappointment with Communist Russia, a country he had profoundly admired, fundamentally derives from the transformation into a dictatorship Stalin projected and carried out after the Second World War. The consequences of his distrust and rejection of the reformulated Communist ideology that started to proliferate in the USSR were the enormous difficulties he had for the publication of *Animal Farm* in England, a Russian ally by the time. Due to Orwell's pricking and lashing vision of Russian Communism, many publishing houses denied bringing out the novel. Finally, it was the editor Warburg that decided to publish the book.

following quotation reveals the extent to which Harris amplifies the range of his satiric attack against the very nature of dictatorships:

Received Berlin, October 18, 1938

Today, too, as during former conversations, mentioned that very strong anti-Semitic tendencies existed in the United States and that a large portion of the population had an understanding of the German attitude toward the Jews. From his whole personality, I believe he [the President of the USA] would get on very well with the Führer. (305)

Both Orwell and Harris believe that a dictatorship requires ideological and disciplinary mechanisms that nurture its establishment and development. Michel Foucault argued that: “Discipline” may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is “physics” or an “anatomy” of power, a technology’ (206). The mechanisms that support dictatorships are also the objects of attack of both authors. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Fatherland* there is a direct criticism towards the blatant and partial manipulation of history, even to the extent that both Winston Smith and Xavier March, the main character in Harris’s dystopia, do not actually know whether history ever existed, or if it did, whether the accounts they can have access to are reliable. It is commonly believed that history is written by the winners, and this is an assumption that is perfectly recognisable in these two novels. Winston’s duty in the Ministry of Truth is the reconstruction of all those news that may endanger Big Brother’s almost immaculate image. He is also expected to rearrange all those facts that could let on all the atrocities committed by the Party. Hence, the interest in wiping out history and the past among dictators turns out to be their only way of erasing the collective and individual memory of citizenship. Bernard Bergonzi argues that in *Nineteen Eighty-*

Four: ‘the past is no more than a lot of facts that can be learned and unlearned, or a series of entries in history books that can be constantly revised and rewritten’ (218).

The character of Winston Smith enables Orwell to convey the author’s resentment towards all those attempts to vilify history for the sake of presenting a distorted and embellished vision of dictatorships. This resentful attitude in Orwell comes partly from his experiences in the Spanish Civil War, in which he managed to unmask which were the real intentions of mass media. His affiliation to the P.O.U.M. in Spain allowed him to realise that history was constituted by a set of successive lies and that it could thereby be easily tampered with.⁶ Most ideas Orwell recollected in the Spanish battlefields converge on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. These are Winston Smith’s disillusioned views on the concept of history imposed by the Party: ‘And if all others accepted the lie the Party imposed – if all records told the same tale – then the lie passed into history and became truth. “Who controls the past,” run the Party slogan, “controls the future: who controls the present controls the past”’ (31-32). The same disappointment Winston shows in the former quotation can be seen in *Xavier March*. However, Harris adds a further detail that ends up aggravating the situation Orwell presents in his novel. Winston, at least, maintains the hope to preserve his own personal memory intact. In *Fatherland*, March is resigned to accept that the manipulation of history is inevitable and that nothing can be done to remedy it:

“*We’ll change history*” [...] Was history changed so easily? He wondered. Certainly, it was his experience that secrets were an acid – once spilled, they could eat their way through anything: if a marriage, why not a presidency, why not a state? But talk of history – he shook his head at his own reflection – history was beyond him. (331)

6 For a more detailed study of Orwell’s connection with Spain and the intricacies of the Spanish Civil War, see Fernando Galvan’s *George Orwell y España* (1984).

In *Fatherland*, the obliteration of true historical facts finds in the way the Nazi government deals with the Jewish Holocaust a perfect illustration. The fact that triggers off the detective action of the story is March's discovery of a series of documents in which high posts in the Nazi hierarchy assert that what was denominated the 'resettlement of the Jewish population in Eastern Europe' was merely an euphemistic formula that actually masked their massive slaughter in concentration camps. Harris puts forward a new angle in the approach to the Jewish Holocaust and presents it as another partial deviation of the course of history, which, as *Fatherland* demonstrates, can only be explored behind the guise of confusing political and bureaucratic jargon. Besides, it should be added that the manipulation of history, as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* notably illustrates, is usually favoured by the State's overt condescension and permission. *Fatherland* proves, once again, that crimes committed against humankind, being the Jewish Holocaust one of the most painful exponents, could have been softened simply for the sake of preserving the Führer's outward image of integrity. In the following quotation, we can see how the Jewish question is consciously put aside in State official documents:

Sturmabannführer Lange stated that three methods had been undertaken recently, providing an opportunity for comparison. On November 30, one thousand Berlin Jews had been shot in the forest near Riga. On December 8, his men had organized a special treatment at Kulmhof with gas trucks [...]. Against this, in the margin, Heydrich had written 'No!' March checked the final version of the minutes. This entire section of the conference had been reduced to a single phrase: 'Finally, there was a discussion of various types of solution possibilities.' (315)

This quotation exemplifies quite remarkably that manipulation is commanded and implemented from positions of outstanding political responsibility, which reinforces even more the dramatic

situation Harris portrays in his novel.⁷ The 'No!' Heydrich energetically utters in the previous quotation also reminds us of the pressures Winston receives in the Ministry of Truth to alter the content of documents. We should conclude, thus, that both Orwell and Harris basically agree on the idea that facts of this magnitude have a deep-rooted political component. What dystopias end up showing is the desolate state societies may reach if all these political stratagems were allowed, and even encouraged, as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Fatherland* corroborate.

Together with the distortion of the past and history, Orwell and Harris endow their novels with further traits which heighten their dystopic background. One of the characteristics both works share is the faithful description of the repressive measures that are at the dictatorship's disposal. Among the multiple instances the two novels offer, there are four mechanisms which are patently satirised by both authors: propaganda, censorship, bureaucracy and physical and technological means for subduing the population. Besides describing the effects of these mechanisms, the intention of these two writers is to satirise and parody them. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the purpose of censorship is the coercion of people and the subsequent annihilation of their sensitivities. This explains why, in dictatorial regimes, anything that is not controlled by the State is prone to be dangerous, and, therefore, punishable. In this vein, Orwell's novel is rich in the presentation of situations in which characters live through the malign effects of censorship. Literature, which in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is not only an artistic representation but probably the last safeguard of the past, is forcefully prosecuted by the

7 In his study of the life and works of George Orwell, Christopher Hollis points out that this manifest will to get rid of the past aims at alienating the people's capacity to face history in an impartial or, as he puts it, 'cynical' way (190).

Party.⁸ Anything that develops and cultivates the imagination of citizens is eventually done away with, and books are, of course, the first to be banned.

Harris's *Fatherland* adopts a very similar position and describes a world in which reading is 'officially' discouraged. As in puritan times, in which the enrichment of the literary spirit was regarded as a sinful activity, Harris describes how dictatorships force the transformation of the people's artistic aspirations into a feeling of mass hysteria. The following lines illustrate the 'cultural and literary policy' of totalitarian regimes:

March had seen a score of young men like Jost in the past year. There were more of them every day. Rebellion against their parents. Questioning the state. Listening to American radio stations. Circulating their crudely printed copies of proscribed books – Günter Grass and Graham Greene, George Orwell and J. D. Salinger. (18)⁹

The authors Harris mentions in this excerpt are highly symbolical, since all of them were famous for their tumultuous relationship with the establishment and for the powerful satirical component of their works.¹⁰ Suffice is to say that Grass's *The Tin Drum*, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* are now recognised as some of the most polemical and straightforward attacks against the

8 According to Bernard Bergonzi: 'Literature is one of the major ways in which the past is re-enacted in the present, and George Orwell was a very literary writer' (221).

9 Harris does not only refer to how the Party repeatedly cuts down on literary publications. He also mentions how certain news are systematically omitted from newspapers or simply distorted (39) and how religion is undermined by the Party (23).

10 The relationship between satire and censorship has been largely studied by critics. Dustin Griffin (*Satire* 139, 'Venting Spleen' 132), Kenneth Burke (199) or Gary Dyer (71-72) agree on considering that, although the publication of satire has been historically hindered by censorship, the final outcome was that satires published under the pressures of the establishment were far more brilliant as regards the use of satirical strategies and the power of their attack.

establishment and the biased policies it implements. Curiously enough, in the appendix that contains the principles of Newspeak, Orwell also lists a series of authors whose work was about to be destroyed. As Harris, Orwell mostly includes satirical writers, seen by the Party as possible instigators of rebellious and resisting minds:

Various writers such as Shakespeare, Milton, Byron, Swift, Dickens and some others were in the process of translation: when the task had been completed, their original writings, with all else that survived of the literature of the past, would be destroyed. These translations were a slow and difficult business, and it was not expected that they would be finished before the first or second decade of the twenty-first century. (292)

Besides censorship, there is another mechanism dictatorships usually recur to in order to spread their ideological bases. Propaganda is one of the political instruments both Orwell and Harris satirise more vehemently. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Fatherland*, the presence of posters displaying the threatening face of Big Brother and Hitler respectively, the haranguing messages transmitted through the telescreens or loudspeakers and the partisan exaltation of the virtues of the country in detriment of other nations endorses the suffocating atmosphere the Party wants to create. The first detail that captures the reader's attention is the overwhelming number of billboards showing the face of the two dictators. In the first page of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* we already find a reference to the character that determines and conditions Winston Smith's evolution throughout the novel: 'On each landing, opposite the lift shaft, the poster with enormous faces gazed from the wall. It was one of those pictures which are so contrived that the eyes follow you when you move. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption beneath it ran' (1). One of *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* accomplishments is the way it reflects the anguish that a human being can suffer when he/she feels himself/herself constantly

watched over. This same anxiety can be noticed in Harris's *Fatherland*, in which the author draws on a similar technique in order to highlight the control exercised by the dictator.¹¹ Since the novel takes place one week before the Führer's birthday, Berlin is depicted as a city packed with posters of Hitler's face: 'In the big shops, the windows piously displayed large gilt-framed photographs of the Führer—the official portrait from the mid 1950s by the English photographer Cecil Beaton [...]. Soon the city would be a forest of red, white and black' (138). The effect Orwell and Harris seem to recreate is the bulging level of fetishism that derives from a dictatorship, a fact that purposefully aims at obscuring its real motivations and at promulgating its massive and unquestioned acceptance among citizens.

One of the gauges that measures the efficiency of a dictatorship, and which also contributes to increase this impression of obscurity and confusion, is its bureaucratic apparatus. In this sense, bureaucracy turns out to be one of the targets Orwell most bitinglly attacks in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where he repeatedly resorts to specific rhetorical strategies to make his criticism much more ingenious. For the sake of presenting a world dominated by paperwork, he draws on exaggeration, a typically satiric device with which he manages to portray a society that is totally regulated and configured by the dictates of bureaucrats. As a matter of fact, Winston's occupation in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is basically that of an anonymous civil servant, a fact that explains why Orwell, through the eyes of his main character, devotes long excerpts of his book to a minute description of the activities carried out in the different ministries.

11 One of the targets satirists have most often denounced is that of propaganda. James Sutherland (21) and Leonard Feinberg (14) suggest that one of the vices satirists have more forcefully strive to suppress is that of propaganda, due particularly to the distortion of truth it brings about.

Particularly, it is the very language used in these governmental institutions the key aspect to understand the extent to which bureaucracy helps dictatorships to hinder people's access to reliable and impartial sources of information. Newspeak, the codified language created for administrative use, clearly exemplifies the Party's continuous attempts to blur Oceania's actual political and economic state.¹² The exceedingly distorted language Orwell presents in the following quotation is somehow a reflection of the type of society created and ruled by Big Brother:

Winston examined the four slips of paper which he had unrolled. Each contained a message of only two lines, in the abbreviated jargon – not actually Newspeak, but consisting largely of Newspeak words – which was turned in the Ministry for internal purposes. They ran:
 times 17.3.84 bb speech malreported africa rectified
 times 19.12.83 forecasts 3yp 4th quarter 83 misprints verify current issue
 times 14.2.84 miniplenty malquoted chocolate rectify
 times 3.12.83 reporting bb dayorder doubleplusungood refs unpersons rewrite full wise upwise antefiling. (35)

This incomprehensible parlance is partially the result of cutting down on the number of words employed in a written or spoken text. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, one of the main intentions of bureaucrats is to reduce the lexical spectrum of people so that their vocabulary is exclusively constituted by the words approved of and admitted by the Party. As with literature, the Party aims at creating a linguistic system in which words progressively lose all their poetic, imaginative, poignant or emotional component, thus, favouring a rigidly systemic,

12 In *The Language of George Orwell* (1995), Roger Fowler perceives substantial parallelisms between the fictional language Orwell creates in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the real language utilised in the English administrative spheres after the war (220). Though purposefully distorted and exaggerated, we can see how Orwell's Newspeak was indirectly based on a real fact.

pragmatic and impersonal terminology. Echoing Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), bureaucrats remind us of all those eccentric Laputan academics, whose linguistic projects mainly consisted in taking away from language as many words as possible, mostly verbs:

The first project was to shorten discourse by cutting polysyllables into one, and leaving out verbs and participles, because in reality all things imaginable are but nouns. The other project was a scheme for entirely abolishing all words whatsoever, and this was urged as a great advantage in point of health as well as brevity. (230)

Harris's *Fatherland* also directs a forthright criticism towards the manipulative function of bureaucracy in dictatorships. Although he does not focus his satiric attack so much on the language used and promulgated by bureaucrats, Harris also reveals the same kind of vices Orwell denounces in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Though essentially similar, the difference between Orwell's and Harris's novels again lies on the fact that Harris humorously ironises about the patently useless bureaucratic activity of the Nazi administration. Also by means of exaggerations, Harris ironically paints the German bureaucracy as a necessary means for the good functioning and stability of the country:

What a monument to the German bureaucracy this place was. Herr A., wishing to do something, asked permission of Doctor B. Doctor B. covered himself by referring it upward to Ministerialdirektor C. Then Ministerialdirektor C. shuffled to Reichminister D., who said he would leave to the judgement of Herr A., who naturally went back to Doctor B [...]. (246)

The never-ending chain of requests and permissions that are never considered, let alone resolved, are revealed by the circularity of the process that starts in Herr A. and finishes in Herr A. back again. The fictional realm in which both Orwell and Harris frame their satiric criticism towards bureaucracy should not prevent us from realising that what they are actually

portraying accords almost exactly with the reality ordinary citizens have to negotiate in their everyday life. In this sense, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and even more conspicuously *Fatherland*, manage to fulfil one of the premises on which satiric literature has been often sustained, what Edward Rosenheim commonly denominated 'referentiality' or the validation of the external reality. Rosenheim pointed out:

All satire is not only an attack; it is an attack upon *discernible, historically authentic particulars*. The 'dupes' or victims of punitive satire are not mere fictions. They, or the objects which they represent, must be, or have been, plainly existent in the world of reality; they must, that is possess genuine historic identity. The reader must be capable of pointing to the world of reality, past or present, and identifying the individual or group, institution, custom, belief, or idea which is under attack by the satirist. (318)

As Rosenheim asserts, most satirists seem to pursue clarity and straightforwardness in their satiric attack. *Fatherland* proves to be a novel that adjusts to this requisite. The reader finds no obscurity or complexity in identifying that the target Harris is unquestionably picking on is the excessively pre-eminent role adopted by bureaucrats in modern societies.

The maximum representation of bureaucracy in both novels is, of course, epitomised by the dictators. This seems to be one of the factors that enables both Orwell and Harris to present them as quasi-godly figures, whose rule and command seems to be a gift directly bestowed by the divine providence. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Fatherland* accurately portray the extent to which both Big Brother and Hitler are no longer regarded as human beings but as deified entities, who are hysterically worshipped and adored by the population. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston disappointedly perceives that his fellow-citizens

are unable to cast doubts upon the presupposed but never contended 'divine infallibility' of Big Brother:¹³

But the face of Big Brother seemed to persist for several seconds on the screen, as though the impact that it had made on everyone's eyeballs was too vivid to wear off immediately. The little sandy-haired woman had fling herself forward over the back of the chair in like. 'My Saviour!' she extended her arms towards the screen. Then she buried her face in her hands. It was apparent that she was uttering a prayer. (15)

This woman's outrageous yelling demonstrates that one of the premises on which the success of a dictatorship is based is to de-rationalise the consciences of citizens by means of harangues and vituperative messages against its enemies. With this, the dictatorship, as Orwell masterly portrays, ends up becoming a modern realisation of the feudal system. It is clearly discernible that both the feudal system that prevailed in Europe in the Middle Ages and dictatorships display a substantial number of parallelisms. In this vein, the dictator would epitomise the figure of the landlord, who grants protection and shelter to his peasants in exchange of their work. Furthermore, the absolute power that entailed the feudal system and dictatorships was justified by the fact that it was God's commandment. This explains why, in the feudal hierarchy, God was on top and the landlord came immediately after, thus, performing the role of God's emissary on earth.

Robert Harris puts forward and emphasises Orwell's viewpoints in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, although *Fatherland* is even more prolific in the passages in which Hitler adopts this

13 The infallibility that was attributed to dictators is openly satirised in Harris's *Fatherland* as well. As in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in which the telescreens are constantly emitting messages praising the achievements of Oceania's triumphant military operations, Harris parodies, by means of repeating identical syntactic structures, the Führer's military 'skills' as well as his scientific and strategic omniscience (83).

completely god-like appearance. The novel begins with an SS oath that reads as follows:

I swear to Thee, Adolf Hitler,
As Führer and Chancellor of the German Reich,
Loyalty and Bravery,
I vow to Thee and to the superiors
Whom Thou shalt appoint
Obedience unto Death
So help me God. (1)

As though it were a Christian prayer, we notice in this oath several traits in which this Hitler-God's transfiguration is perfectly recognisable. First of all, forms of address such 'Thee' or 'Thou' are capitalised, similarly as when we use 'He' to refer to Jesus Christ. This confers Hitler this godly image, and at the same time, points to the blindness among all those who could admit to swear this oath. Besides, Hitler's deification reaches an even more dramatic dimension, especially when children are surreptitiously indoctrinated to profess these fervent and pious attitudes. In both *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Fatherland*, we find numerous examples in which children are the ones who contribute more decisively to heighten the deification of both Hitler and Big Brother. In Orwell's novel, we can see how children actively collaborate with the thought-police in the detection, prosecution and suffocation of potential upheavals against Big Brother's totalitarian supremacy (23).¹⁴ In *Fatherland*, children address thankful prayers to Hitler, acknowledging him as their benefactor and protector. Once again, religious images are inevitably associated with the dictator: he is the donor of all

14 In *Fatherland*, March's own son, Pili, also owns up to his father's clandestine activities and to his resistance against the Party's law. Harris's novel illustrates quite remarkably that all the mechanisms for repression function more effectively if people are brainwashed from a very early age (337-38).

commodities, food and drink, and that is the reason why children are taught to thank him for his generosity:

A pair of blackboards from which the pupils were being taught the Party's special grace. On one:

Before meals –

Führer, my Führer, bequeathed to me by the Lord,

Protect and preserve me as long as I live!

Thou hast rescued Germany from deepest distress,

I thank thee today for my daily bread.

Abideth thou long with me, forshaketh me not,

Führer, my Führer, my faith and my light!

Heil, mien Führer! (287)

As we can see, *Fatherland* is especially rich in the exposition of propagandistic subterfuges and totalitarian mechanisms. Harris also alludes to issues such as the exaltation of Germany as another means of propaganda. One of the most significant examples of this blind patriotism – mercilessly satirised by Harris – takes place at the beginning of the novel. March is accompanying his little son Pili in a guided bus tour around the city of Berlin. The discourse of the tourist guide is full of flattering and chauvinistic words towards the hugeness of the Nazi architecture:

'The arch is constructed of granite and has a capacity of two million, three hundred and sixty five thousand, six hundred and eighty-five cubic meters.' She sneezed. 'The Arc of Triomphe in Paris will fit into it forty-nine times' [...]. 'Leaving the arch, we enter the central section of the Avenue of Victory [...]. It is one hundred and twenty-three meters wide and five-point six kilometres in length. It is both wider, and two and a half times longer, than the Champs Elysées in Paris.' (24-25)¹⁵

15 In his brief commentary on *Fatherland*, Booker explains that: 'The most striking products of the Nazi culture industry are a variety of colossal architectural monuments that attempt to convey the power and grandeur of Germany through sheer size' (165).

Apparently grandiose and spectacular, the impression these lines convey is highly satiric. By overemphasising the grandiosity of its architecture, the Nazi government does nothing but revealing an acute inferiority complex. The building of these stunning monuments is, as March ironically remarks, the only way to overshadow the visible limitations of Hitler's administration: 'Higher, longer, bigger, wider, more expensive [...] even in victory thought March, Germany has a parvenu's inferiority complex. Nothing stands on its own. Everything has to be compared with what the foreigners have [...]' (25). Furthermore, I would also like to add that, according to Alvin Kernan, the inclusion of this kind of buildings is a manifestly satiric device employed by satirists, precisely for ridiculing dullness and pomposity (*The Plot* 36).

To complete the analysis of the dystopic world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Fatherland*, it can be worthwhile including some commentaries on other subsidiary, but equally effective, mechanisms for repression that appear in these novels. Telescreens, loudspeakers, thought-police, sexual repression are all icons that we tend to associate with dictatorships, and that Orwell's privileged imagination managed to engender in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Their presence is unequivocal and is intensified as the novel advances. Any movement, word or thought is constantly scrutinised by the telescreen, which is the vehicle through which the Party can instantly detect possible outbursts of rebellion or deviations from the established rules. The success of the telescreen, a direct reflection of Foucault's theories on 'panopticism',¹⁶ relies on the so-called 'thought-police,' a body of officers who strictly control the thoughts of citizens and punish them if they do not adjust to the Party's dictates. In spite of the harsh methods employed by the thought-police, Orwell finds room for a note of humorous satire. Drawing on animal imagery, Orwell ridicules the apparent

16 For further information on Foucault's 'panopticism,' see the chapter he devotes to this issue in his book *Vigilar y Castigar* (199-230).

fierceness of these officers: 'Even the streets leading up to its outer barriers were roamed by gorilla-faced guards in black uniforms, armed with jointed truncheons' (4). In spite of their violent façade, Orwell degrades their authoritarian attitude and stresses their conspicuous dehumanisation by setting this comparison with gorillas.

Harris's *Fatherland* insists on the same issues. However, the presence of police officers in the streets of Berlin is even more noticeable than in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. For this reason, the atmosphere Harris describes is very tense and almost unpalatable. As in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the Nazi regime seeks the regimentation of the population, and it seems that the best way for fulfilling this is by means of this exacerbated control. However, Harris also seeks to deconstruct the image that SS officers and Gestapo members have been traditionally attributed, and he resorts to satire and animal imagery as well. In the following lines we can see how Harris also sets, in what seems to be a reminiscence of Orwell's novel, a comparison between one of these SS officers and a gorilla: "Not two minutes. Now." The man was a gorilla, escaped from the Berlin zoo' (280).¹⁷ Many critics that have dealt with satire coincide that the use of animal imagery is one of the devices satirists more extensively use in their works. M. D. Fletcher argues that: 'In satiric grotesquery the purpose is deflation and ridicule and caricature may extend to animal imagery and metamorphosis' (4). The abundant animalisation of human beings Orwell and Harris portray in the novels is nothing but a direct reflection of the type of behaviours that can be seen in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Fatherland*. The indiscriminate tortures of Jewish population Harris refers to, the so-called 'Two Minutes Hate' in which

17 The number of examples in *Fatherland* in which Party acolytes are compared to animals uplifts the satiric spirit the novel transmits. The Party leaders are compared to 'golden pheasants' (20), Gestapo members are regarded as 'oxen' (71) and General Nebe is compared to a 'lizard' (147).

Orwell shows the most beastly side of the human condition, are just two examples that may justify the recurrent presence of animal imagery in these two novels.

The repressive apparatus dictatorships hold is not only circumscribed to tangible instruments such as the thought-police, the telescreen or the huge billboards displaying the fearful faces of both dictators. The efficiency of the totalitarian regime basically resides in disguising this apparatus behind a misleading veil of democracy and tolerance. Thus, the control exercised upon citizens is, in most cases, underlying and subliminal, but equally effective. One of these concealed mechanisms is the coercion exerted upon the citizens' personal relationships, especially upon their sexual life. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell portrays a society in which desire and sexual joy are heavily penalised, a society in which sex is only admitted for reproductive purposes. Hence, dictatorships must forbid anything that stimulates the people's senses and sex is likely to be one of these sources. The relationship Julia and Winston maintain clandestinely, the existence of a Junior Anti-Sex League and the Party's continuous warnings forcing people to undermine any kind of pleasure in their sexual intercourses are just some examples of the disgusting atmosphere that surrounds Oceania. As Winston Smith points out: 'This, Winston was aware, was not meant altogether seriously, but somehow it fitted in with the general ideology of the Party. The Party was trying to kill the sex instinct, or, if it could not be killed, then to distort it and dirty it' (61). And then adds: 'what he wanted, more even than to be loved, was to break down that wall of virtue, even if it were only once in his whole life. The sexual act, successfully performed, was rebellion. Desire was thoughtcrime' (63). Paradoxically enough, the proles and animals, as Kumar paraphrases from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, are exempted from this sexual control: 'The sexual puritanism of the Party is not imposed on them. They can marry whom they like, divorce is

permitted, and promiscuity goes unpunished. As the Party slogan puts it, "Proles and animals are free" (329).

The situation Harris presents in *Fatherland* does not vary substantially. Nevertheless, the way Harris deals with the question of sexual repression is completely parodic. Similarly to what happens in Orwell's novel, sex in Hitler's Germany is only conceived of for reproduction. The repression of sexuality enables Harris to intertwine it with a pungent satirical attitude towards the Nazi belief that the Aryan race was innately superior. Therefore, Germans were encouraged to maintain a considerably high birth rate so that this race could be preserved. In *Fatherland*, Harris introduces a note of humorous satire in which the author is clearly parodying the government's policy, which ends up being completely dismantled and ridiculed. We can recognise this parodic scent because Harris alludes to a series of newspaper advertisements – clearly belonging to the contact section – in which men or women ask for particular men or women to ensure the Aryan purity of their offsprings:

FIFTY years old. Pure Aryan doctor, veteran of the Battle of Moscow, who intends to settle on the land, desires male progeny through marriage with healthy, Aryan, virginal, young, unassuming, thrifty woman, adapted to hard work; broad-hipped, flat-heeled and earringless essential. (39)

Besides, Harris is also pointing to the harsh reality women endure in dictatorships and which can be noticed in the previous quotation. Women sexuality is banned and their beauty is blatantly obscured. Anything that embellishes women is, as we can read in the previous lines, discarded and rejected. In this vein, Andy Croft mentions the novel *Swastika Night* (1937), written under the pseudonym of 'Murray Constantine,' which depicts, much in the line of Harris's *Fatherland*, the aftermath of seven hundred years of Nazi domination. In this feminist dystopia, Constantine analyses the horrors and sufferings of several female characters, in a context in which their sexuality

and womanhood is completely subjugated to the manly demands. According to Croft: 'Women are kept together in cages, their heads shaved, their male children taken away at eighteenth months; sexual contact with men is only possible under the cover of darkness, and permanent relationships not permitted, rape is not recognised as a crime' (208). The situation Constantine portrays in *Swastika Night* serves as a perfect antecedent to both *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Fatherland*, two novels in which the reader perceives the extreme alienation women suffer and their relegation to the most humiliating and painful positions.

So far, I have examined the parallelisms that can be observed between Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Harris's *Fatherland*. Issues such as the distortion of history and the past, the repressive nature of bureaucracy, propaganda and censorship as well as the coercion of sexuality prove the extent to which Orwell's novel exerts a notable influence on the dystopic and satiric dimension of Harris's work. Nonetheless, *Fatherland* should not be regarded as a story that merely gathers and develops the topics Orwell poses in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In spite of this visible influence, *Fatherland* clearly succeeds as an innovative dystopia, which departs from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in several aspects that can be worthwhile mentioning. First of all, the figure of both dictators marks a substantial difference between the two novels. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell creates the fictional character of Big Brother whereas Harris endows his narration with more verisimilitude presenting an actual historical figure such as Hitler. It is clear, as John Atkins puts it, that Big Brother is the direct heir of the 'totalitarian legacy' left by Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini (249). However, Orwell, retaking a very traditional satiric formula that he himself adopted in *Animal Farm*, introduces a fictional character in order to disguise his satiric attack. This fundamentally means that Orwell's intention is deviated and concealed under the guise of indirectness satire provides. For times of censorship, in which a

direct and explicit condemnation of Hitler and Stalin could have been severely penalised by the authorities, Orwell decided to create this kind of fictional realm in order to enhance the satirical impact of his criticism.¹⁸

Harris's novel, on the other hand, apparently gains in verisimilitude and realism since some of the characters that appear in it were actual and the dictator is no longer Big Brother but Hitler himself. Therefore, in the last three pages of the novel, Harris refers to all those characters in the novel who existed in real life, something that Orwell could have never done in the time *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was published. It is clear that overt censoring measures, which were still certainly severe in Orwell's days, are no longer operative in the decade of the nineties, and that is why Harris did not need to build up a fictional character or allegorical country in order to criticise the vices and corruption of actual people or nations. Harris's *Fatherland* is, in this sense, a novel whose historical component is much more visible and which seems to be more connected with the real world than *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

This issue can lead me to establish another difference between the two novels. As we know, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* takes place in an imaginary place, although the central core of the action occurs in the remnants of what once was London. Again, Orwell prefers to set the action of his novel in an invented place – as many other satirists like Swift, Butler or Huxley – in order to avoid any possible controversy with censorship. Although he is criticising the horrors of Oceania, his underlying purpose is to satirise the nightmarish reality some European countries were undergoing. In this sense, Orwell builds up a traditional dystopia, in which the plot unfolds in an imaginary and futuristic world. Harris's dystopia, however, differs from Orwell's in the sense that most places and events mentioned in

18 In this respect, Alvin Kernan ('Aggression' 128) and Leonard Feinberg (55) agree on considering detachment and indirection two of the most indispensable strategies satirists have at their disposal.

the novel are real. He refers to Berlin, the United States, England, Switzerland, instead of Oceania, Eurasia or Eastasia. Furthermore, Harris, unlike Orwell, does not look forward in time, but sets the action thirty years before the publication of his book. Thereby, *Fatherland*, though it adjusts to most conventions that have traditionally characterised a dystopia, presents some peculiarities typical of the so-called 'alternate worlds' literature, which Kingsley Amis so successfully cultivated in *Russian Hide-and-Seek*. *Fatherland*, being a detective novel, plays much more with the suspense and uneasiness produced by a question that repeatedly arises while we are reading the novel: what would have happened if the Nazi army had won the Second World War? The world Harris describes in his novel proves to be a good answer to this disquieting question.

The satiric and dystopic dimension of Orwell's literary production has filled the pages of many books, let alone the writing of a great deal of research papers and the celebration of numerous conferences dealing with his work. However, as Robert Harris's novel bears out, Orwell's narratives can be substantially enriched if we examine his legacy on other contemporary novelists that draw on the same strategies to build up their dystopias. In this respect, Robert Harris's *Fatherland*, besides adjusting to many of the general traits that configure a dystopia, offers a significant number of parallelisms with the dystopic world Orwell creates in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The manipulation of history, the pressure of propaganda and censorship, and the suffocating bureaucratic activity both novelists portray have been, among others, some of the similitudes this paper has tried to explore. Besides, it has also been my aim to examine the way in which *Fatherland*, a novel which shows a remarkable number of similitudes with *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, also appears as an original achievement within the long-standing tradition of utopian and dystopian writing. As previously suggested, the number of contemporary authors who

are producing dystopic novels is rapidly increasing and it seems that the Orwellian spirit is and will inevitably be present in their works.

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Orwell and the Evolution of Utopian Writing

In “‘1984’ – The Mysticism of Cruelty,’ Isaac Deutscher observed that ‘Few novels written in this generation have obtained a popularity as great as that of George Orwell’s *1984*’ and that ‘Few, if any, have made a similar impact on politics.’ He insisted that images and phrases from the novel ‘occur in most newspaper articles and speeches denouncing Russia and Communism,’ and that, as a result, ‘The novel has served as a superweapon in the cold war’ (29). The text is here interpreted both as a work of literature and a political statement, and, indeed, was used as such throughout the Cold War period. In an article published in *Marxist Quarterly*, January 1956, James Walsh described *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as ‘one weapon in the war of many fronts that has been waged against the progressive movement and the Soviet Union since 1945 and before,’ and insisted that ‘Its success, its sales, are a measure of the success of cold war propaganda’ (293). In *The English Utopia*, A. L. Morton argued that the novel was ‘for this country at least, the last word in counter-revolutionary apologetics’ (110). This representation of the novel as an attack both on Soviet Communism and the entire Socialist movement has been a consistent element of criticism. Indeed, in his first reader’s report on the novel, Fredric Warburg stated that he took the use of the word ‘Ingsoc’ for the totalitarian political system to be ‘a deliberate and sadistic attack on Socialism and Socialist parties

generally' (480).¹ The consequence of this, as Andy Croft observed, was that 'Much of the left's response to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and its political marketing, has been simply hostile, going to great lengths to attack both the novel and its author' (185). The portrayal of the novel as opposed not only to Soviet Communism but to Socialism, resulted in left-wing critics 'abandoning the novel to the literary right' (185). In addition, the interpretative association of authoritarianism with the Soviet Union informed the subsequent development of utopian fiction. The use of dystopian narratives such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in Cold War propaganda eroded the ability of the genre to act as a form of social criticism in Western Europe and America.² The emphasis in many texts produced after 1950 upon other forces, such as business, illustrates both a response to new historical conditions and a resistance to this integration in the dominant discourse of Western capitalism. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and its critical reception, formed an important literary and political context for the development of the genre.

In a commentary on Samuel Butler's satirical utopia *Erewhon*, Orwell argued that 'All Utopia books are satires or allegories. Obviously if you invent an imaginary country you do so in order to throw light on the institutions of some existing country, probably your own' (*Complete Works* 17: 169). Reviews

1 Few critics, if any, have identified the obvious connection between the word 'Ingsoc' and the full name of the Nazi party, the NSDAP, the National Socialist German Workers Party.

2 In his introduction to *The Faber Book of Utopias*, John Carey wrote that the word 'utopia' means 'no-place,' rather than 'good-place,' and that 'strictly speaking, imaginary good places and imaginary bad places are all utopias.' However, he adds that 'To reject the useful word *dystopia* just because it arose from a misunderstanding would, though, be pedantic and self-defeating' (xi). This essay follows this usage, in which 'utopia' refers to both positive and negative imaginary worlds, whilst 'dystopia' refers exclusively to 'bad places.' In a letter to Julian Symons, dated 4 February 1949, Orwell referred to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a 'Utopia in the form of a novel' (*Complete Works* 20: 35), implying that he used the word 'utopia' in a similar way.

on the first publication of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* identified the connection between conditions in Oceania and those of the period in which the novel was written. Philip Rahv wrote, in *Partisan Review* in July 1949, that 'If it inspires dread above all, that is precisely because its materials are taken from the real world as we know it' (268), and V. S. Pritchett insisted, in *The Statesman and Nation* of June 18, 1949, that 'when it seems to draw the future' it is 'in fact, scourging the present' (22). These parallels had an important narrative function, in that, as Julian Symons stated, in a review in the *Times Literary Supplement*, published on 10 June 1949, 'By creating a world in which the proles have their sentimental songs and their beer, and the privileged consume their Victory gin, Mr Orwell involves us more skilfully and uncomfortably in the story' (253). In addition, however, the correlation between the conditions in Oceania and in the contemporary world identified the text as an intervention in the ideological conflicts of the period, a satire upon tendencies in both intellectual theory and political practice. Indeed, Orwell had insisted, in a statement on *Nineteen Eighty-Four* issued in response to questions from Francis Henson, of the United Automobile Workers, that 'totalitarian ideas have taken root in the minds of intellectuals everywhere, and I have tried to draw these ideas out to their logical conclusion' (*Complete Works* 20: 136).³

Nineteen Eighty-Four was produced both within the context of both the generic conventions established by preceding utopias and the ideological conflicts that followed the end of the Second World War. The novel used the literary material it inherited but transformed it within the terms of historical 'reality,' a reality with which it engaged in what Pierre Macherey, in *A Theory of Literary Production*, has described as 'a tense and ever renewed confrontation' (80). These generic conventions were the product of an extensive, diverse tradition, but in his

3 For a description of the conditions under which Orwell issued this statement, see Bernard Crick's *George Orwell: A Life* (569-70).

essays and correspondence Orwell identified a number of utopian narratives as specific sources for his work. Indeed, the first reference to the novel comes in a letter to Gleb Struve, on 17 February 1944, to thank him for a copy of *25 Years of Soviet Russian Literature*. Orwell informed him that ‘It has already around my interest in Zamyatin’s *We*, which I had not heard of before. I am interested in that kind of book, and even keep making notes for one myself that may get written sooner or later’ (*Complete Works* 16: 99). *We*, a dystopian novel written by the Russian novelist Yevgeny Zamyatin, describes the relationship between I-330 and D-503, and their rebellion against the authoritarian Onestate of which they are both citizens or Numbers. The relationship ends when I-330 undergoes surgery to remove his imagination, and D-503 is tortured by the state before being sentenced to death. The account of a couple asserting their individuality against a totalitarian government has definite parallels to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*,⁴ and indeed Orwell himself emphasised the importance of the earlier novel. In ‘Freedom and Happiness,’ published in *Tribune* on 4 January 1946, he wrote that ‘It is this intuitive grasp of the irrational side of totalitarianism – human sacrifice, cruelty as an end in itself, the worship of the leader who is credited with divine attributes – that makes Zamyatin’s book superior to Huxley’s’ (*Complete Works* 18: 15). However, whilst Orwell used these aspects of *We* in the production of his own utopia, the divisions between the two novels demonstrates, not only the distinctions between the writers, but also that between the periods of the novels’ production, divisions which initiated developments in the form itself.

Zamyatin wrote his utopia between 1920 and 1921, whilst he was still living in Russia, although it was first published in a French translation in 1929. In contrast to Orwell, who emphasised the parallels between Oceania and ‘the real world as

4 Isaac Deutscher even argued that Orwell had plagiarised *We* in writing *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

we know it,' *We* is set centuries in the future, after the '200-Years War,' a war that only '0.2 of the world's population survived' (22). The text presents a world overtly distanced from that of the early twentieth-century, a conspicuously artificial environment separated from the outside world by walls of green glass. As in Oceania, the government uses constant surveillance to control its citizens, in this case achieved by glass houses, in which the blinds can be lowered only briefly on a 'Sex Day' (19). In addition, as in Oceania, this intercourse is organised by the state, in this instance through a structure of sexual exchange in which 'Any Number has the right of access to any other number as sexual product' (22). Power in OneState is realised in this system of rigid organisation, not only of economic production, but also of all human activity. This system demands, not emotional commitment, but obedience to the 'Table of Hours' (11), and the authorities execute those responsible for actions 'unforeseen, unaccounted for in advance' (25). OneState imposes an absolute uniformity, in which 'at one and the same second we leave for a stroll and go to the auditorium, to the hall for the Taylor exercises, and then to bed' (13). This methodology corresponds to that in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in the desire to absorb the individual consciousness. The state is legitimised by an appeal to happiness, order, stability and the elimination of criminality. It posits, as R-13 describes it, a choice between 'happiness without freedom, or freedom without happiness' (61). Indeed the Benefactor, the authoritarian figurehead of the state, promises to 'bind them to that happiness with a chain,' and equates OneState with the traditional image of a paradise in which individuals have 'lost all knowledge of desires, pity, love' (203). In *We*, Zamyatin emphasised an absolute control founded on mechanical rationality, and satirised both authoritarian government and the pursuit of efficiency.

Nineteen Eighty-Four used the images of surveillance, mental control, collective gatherings and regulation of private

activity outlined in *We*, as well as the narrative structure of a relationship conducted in contravention of the dictates of an authoritarian state. However, Orwell adapted this material, incorporating references to both contemporary ideological problems and totalitarian practices. In this process, he used works such as James Burnham's *The Managerial Revolution* to construct a framework within which these ideological and political problems could be articulated. This included the impression of imminent crisis and historical transition prevalent in texts produced in this period. Burnham, on whose work Orwell wrote two articles, argued that 'the capitalist organization of society has entered its final years' (35), and that in the future control would be exercised by a 'managerial' class who controlled but did not own the means of production. The managers would 'exploit the rest of society as a corporate body, their rights belonging to them not as individuals, but through the position of actual directing responsibility which they occupy' (109). Burnham insisted that these arguments were of immediate concern, founded, not upon theoretical speculation, but upon 'what *already* has happened and is now happening' (67), and that this was inevitably accompanied by brutality, as 'Revolutionary mass movements, terror, purges, are usual phases of a major social transition' (227). The book was an important source for *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which incorporates, not only the concept of an oligarchical government founded upon collective control of the means of production, but the ideas that 'the world political system will coalesce into *three* primary super-states' (150). The analysis provided a framework for Orwell's dystopian narrative and enabled the exploration of ideas of power and the state. Burnham's interpretation of historical conditions provided one context for the transformation of the generic conventions that Orwell had inherited from writers such as Zamyatin.⁵

5 The two main articles on Burnham are 'Second Thoughts on James Burnham,' first published in *Polemic*, 3 May 1946 (*Complete Works* 18: 268-

The impression of impending crisis outlined by Burnham is integral to narrative method of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In contrast to *We*, the novel is set only thirty-five years after its publication and represents a society that is simultaneously alien and corresponds to 'the real world as we know it.' This image of an immediate totalitarian threat, produced by state violence, is demonstrated in other texts produced in this period. Storm Jameson's novel *The Moment of Truth*, for example, also published in 1949, is set during the final stages of a Russian invasion of Britain which follows a nuclear war. The novel represents a few days in a long period of continuous warfare, concluding in the Soviet conquest of Europe. In this environment, peace exists for the young only as an inherited memory. The pilot Cordelia Hugh-Brown claims that her mother 'could remember what it was like before the first war,' but concedes that this means only that 'she could remember that there was such a time – not what it must have felt like' (10). For David Marriot, however, a British pilot who is also a committed Communist, the destructive war is an inevitable process of transition, and he condemns 'the imbeciles everywhere who think they can push history back without rotting their hands' (123). The novel incorporates the images of violent historical developments and political state oppression prevalent in the period, images that were the context for the production of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The warning of General Thorburn that Marriot will, if he works for the Communists, 'begin agreeing to kill poor innocent devils for not having the sort of sentiments you think they ought to have, you'll absolve

84), and 'Burnham's View of the Contemporary World Struggle,' published in *The New Leader* on 29 March 1947 (*Complete Works* 19: 96-105). The former was later republished as a pamphlet, under the title *James Burnham and the Managerial Revolution*. However references to Burnham can also be found elsewhere in Orwell's work, including in "'As I Please," 7,' published on 14 January 1944 (*Complete Works* 16: 60-64) and "'As I Please," 57,' published 2 February 1945 (*Complete Works* 17: 37-39).

yourself in the holy name of the people or the revolution or something equally exalted and nebulous' (154) emphasises the fear of a political domination realised in violence and ideological control. The perceived potential for imminent social transformation and the imposition of totalitarian rule is realised in a variety of works contemporary to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In addition, in certain texts, such as *The Moment of Truth*, this process was explicitly associated with Soviet Communism.

These historical conditions informed *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in its transformation of the utopian conventions that it had inherited, and, as a result, determined its impact upon the subsequent evolution of the genre. Orwell used material from preceding texts such as Zamyatin's *We*, Butler's *Erewhon*, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, and Jack London's *The Iron Heel*, but incorporated the sense of contemporary political crisis also demonstrated in Burnham's *The Managerial Revolution* and Jameson's *The Moment of Truth*. The novel used the intellectual and political tendencies of its period, and, like *We* or *The Iron Heel*, figured the centralised state as the instrument of oppression. However, it resisted an identification with a specific government or philosophy in the manner of *The Moment of Truth*. Orwell emphasised an immediacy both in the realist narrative form he adopted, and in the parallels between conditions in Oceania and contemporary Britain. In addition, the text destabilised the division between the narrator, who defines the interpretative perspective of the reader, and the society represented, a division often enforced in utopian narratives in the figure of an external traveller or visitor.⁶ In contrast to

6 This is even true of *Brave New World*, in which John, the 'Savage,' is a visitor from another culture, albeit one artificially maintained by the dominant order. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, of course, Winston Smith can be seen as a 'traveller,' in that his commitment to a previous age isolates him from the environment around him, and gives him another perspective upon the world he inhabits, corresponding to that of the implied reader. Nevertheless, is not perceived as such by those around him, merely as a deviant citizen, and the state is therefore not explained

protagonists such as Gulliver or the narrator of Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*, Winston Smith is, like D-503, located from the opening of the novel within the social structure of Oceania, although he is also, of course, alienated from it by his memories of the past. This prior integration prevents the explanation of the society, of the type given in Aldous Huxley's utopia *Island*, and produces a narrative that, in Symons's phrase 'involves us more skilfully and uncomfortably in the story.' Indeed, no systematic explanation of the structure or origins of Oceania is given until Winston reads Goldstein's book *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, a text with an ambiguous status, which O'Brien claims to have written, or 'collaborated in writing' (274). This direct connection to other narratives of the period indicates that the novel is both as an analytical structure and a political act. The text does not emphasise the distance between Oceania and the contemporary world, as in Lilliput, *Erewhon* or even *OneState*, but emphasises the points of comparison, in the transposed landscape of post-war Britain.

This immediacy is reinforced by the inclusion in the narrative of references to authoritarian practices familiar to a contemporary audience. In an analysis of totalitarianism in 'Looking Back on the Spanish War,' probably written in 1942,⁷ Orwell wrote that

The implied objective of this line of thought is a nightmare world in which the Leader, or some ruling clique, controls not only the future but *the past*. If the Leader says of such and such an event, 'It never happened' – well, it never happened. If he says that two and two are five – well, two and two are five. (*Complete Works* 13: 504)

to him, as it is even in *Brave New World*. A corresponding figure, of an individual isolated from the dominant order by temperament, might be F. Alexander in *A Clockwork Orange*.

7 The estimate is Peter Davison's, but it follows the earlier attribution of the essay to the same year in the earlier four-volume edition of Orwell's essays, letters and journalism edited by Ian Angus and Sonia Orwell.

The statement demonstrates a concern with the perversion of language and historical records in the period, concerns that defined his final novel. In his writing in this period, he emphasised both the brutalities described by Burnham as the 'usual phases of a major social transition' and the potential for the consolidation of an authoritarian state in the control of the means of representation. The transformation of historical records in Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany demonstrated an attempt to prevent the reinterpretation of texts or events, to ensure that they were monological, defined by political interests. The removal of Trotsky from Russian accounts of the revolution, and suppression of the Hitler-Stalin pact in teaching material on Soviet schools, for example, were, for Orwell, evidence of the use of a modified past to legitimise present policy decisions.⁸ *Nineteen Eighty-Four* identified the importance of historical records both in personal and collective identities, and also the attempt of government, as he wrote in a review of *Russia Under Soviet Rule*, published in 1939, 'to produce a breed of men who do not wish for liberty' (*Complete Works* 11: 317). In this analysis, modern political methods were intended to produce, as O'Brien insists in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, a state in which 'Whatever the Party holds to be truth, *is* truth' (261), a state founded upon violence and the control of representation. The novel incorporates the 'human sacrifice, cruelty as an end in itself, the worship of the leader who is credited with divine

8 Orwell appears to have known less about the Nazi distortion of history and this forms a less frequent example. The Nazi government practised a thorough rewriting of historical records, including such details as the suppression of Berlin's origins as a Slavic city, information that, as Alexandra Richie notes, in *Faust's Metropolis*, 'disappeared from the 1937 *Badeker*,' producing the impression that 'these people had contributed nothing to the history of the city' (39). Orwell did record Nazi abuses of language. In his news commentary of 12 December 1942, for example, he observed that Himmler used the term 'liquidation' to described the slaughter of Polish Jews, and noted that 'in totalitarian language liquidation is a polite name for murder' (*Complete Works* 14: 234).

attributes' that Orwell identified in Zamyatin, but locates them within a framework of contemporary political tendencies. The use of material from the European totalitarian regimes of the period, Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, and the immediacy of its narrative, enabled it to function as a polemic, a political act, but it also enabled the interpretative reduction of the text to a transcription of a precise historical regime. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* transformed the utopian conventions it inherited to explore the logic of contemporary political developments, and in particular the function of the control of representation in the consolidation of state power, but this emphasis upon totalitarianism as a contemporary phenomena, resulted in its reception as an 'anti-Communist' text. The division is therefore that between an interpretation of the novel as an analysis of political tendencies of which Stalinism is one example, and its interpretation as an attack upon Stalinism and Communism as such.

In a letter to Victor Gollancz, dated 25 March 1947, Orwell stated that for 'quite 15 years' he had regarded the Soviet state with 'plain horror' (*Complete Works* 19: 90). Nevertheless, in a letter to the Duchess of Atholl of 15 November 1945, he had written that 'I belong to the Left and must work inside it, much as I hate Russian totalitarianism and its poisonous influence in this country' (*Complete Works* 17: 385). This distinction between Russian totalitarianism and 'the Left' is replicated throughout his work. In 'In Defence of Comrade Zilliacus,' for example, written for *Tribune* in 1947, but not published, he wrote that 'Social Democracy, unlike capitalism, offers an alternative to Communism' and argued for a European movement that would 'introduce Socialism without secret police forces, mass deportations and so forth' (*Complete Works* 19: 181). However, despite this, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was interpreted by numerous critics as an attack on both Stalinism and the Left. James Walsh, for example, stated that Orwell had joined 'the socialist movement for a while, long enough to learn a few superficial

facts about it, and then run shrieking into the arms of the capitalist publishers with a couple of horror-comics which bring him fame and fortune, and recognition of his individuality and love of freedom' (290).⁹ I. Anisimov insisted, in *Pravda*, on 12 May 1950, that 'It is clear that Orwell's filthy book is in the spirit of such a vital organ of American propaganda as the *Reader's Digest* which published this work, and *Life* which presented it with many illustrations' (282). These interpretations were produced within the binary ideological divisions of the emergent Cold War in which Socialism was frequently identified, by both Left and Right, with Soviet Communism.

This binary structure obscures the specific content of political positions, and instead categorises them within a mythic evaluative system.¹⁰ In *Totalitarian Language*, John Young argued that in the rhetorical strategies of totalitarian states 'All is unqualifiedly white or black, light or dark, positive or negative, true or false, good or evil. In the final analysis, everyone in every society, regardless of his subjective opinions, is objectively for one side or the other and against its adversary' (93). In the Cold War period, these structures were utilised in the propaganda of both dominant ideological groups. As Noam Chomsky argued, in *Deterring Democracy*, for the American state, 'The basic structure of the arguments has the childlike simplicity of a fairy tale. There are two forces in the world, at 'opposite poles.' In the one corner we have absolute evil; in the other sublimity. There can be no compromise between them' (10).

9 Indeed, Walsh further insisted that 'In the case of Orwell, we find ourselves in the company of a mind which is so limited by the nature of prejudices arising out of his status in capitalist society that he is incapable, despite a certain fluent strength, of producing anything which can legitimately be described as a work of art' (290-91).

10 This binary division is also demonstrated in the categorisation of dictatorial states in central American, with substantial records of human rights abuses, as 'democracies,' as a consequence of their opposition to Communism. 'Democracy,' in this context, operates as an evaluative term without a specific content.

This division between ‘the noble purpose of the free society and the evil design of the slave state’ is not the product of political decisions or historical processes, but of ‘innate properties, which derive from their very nature’ (13). The critical integration of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* within this system, therefore, constructs the text as a realisation of an established ideological position. This process obscures the potential multiplicity of its symbols and their capacity for redeployment.

This critical reduction of the text to a transcription of a historical narrative or a prophesy of the results of a particular political system is demonstrated even in many of those texts that attempted to dislocate the connection between *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the Soviet Union. In *1984 and ‘1984,’* published in Moscow in 1984, Melor Sturua insisted that ‘George Orwell conceived his social and political novel as a satire of socialist society’ (4). However, Sturua nevertheless argued that

history has played – and could not help playing – a malicious joke on both author and his apologists. Every year from 1949 to 1984 has ever more clearly and convincingly shown that without himself wishing it or being aware of it (though the latter point could be disputed) George Orwell drew not only a caricature of socialism and communism but a perfectly realistic picture of modern capitalism and imperialism. (4)

This reinterpretation of relationship between the novel and historical ‘reality’ is supported by Josef Skalsky, who wrote in *Who Has the Strongest Claim to Being Big Brother?*, published in Prague in the same year, that ‘The source of Orwell’s popularity lies obviously above all in the scope of his work, the fact that the feelings and fears of his characters ring true for millions of those who live in the “Western civilisation”’ (101). Sturua and Skalsky both emphasise divisions of wealth, government surveillance, and the dominance of the economy by a small number of businesses in ‘Western civilisation,’ and America in particular, as the basis of their analyses. In addition, the texts

imply a distinction between conditions within Western countries and those in the Soviet Union. Indeed, Skalsky insisted that 'The world of socialism has no knowledge of unemployment and social uncertainty, hunger, illiteracy, crime waves, terrorism and drug addiction, or any of the other disorders that are yet to disappear from the metropolis of "Oceania"' (99). However, whilst these critical analyses of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* disrupt the connection between the novel and Soviet Communism, they retain the concept of the book as a prophesy of material and political developments. The displacement of emphasis to what Sturua described as 'Those very forces over to whose side Orwell ran like a coward, forsaking the barricades of Republican Spain' (21), is an inversion of terms within the binary logic of the Cold War.

Orwell's insistence that utopias are 'satires or allegories' emphasises their production as a transformation of literary, ideological and historical narratives into symbolic structures that function at a formal distance from this material. Indeed, this division is indicated in the generic category 'utopia' itself. The word means 'no-place,' and this explicitly fictional location emphasises a critical distance that enables the dislocation of symbols and images from their immediate interpretative contexts. The utopian work is, of course, a communicative act produced within a specific ideological context, and is used to examine 'some existing country.' However, the act of transposition results in a dual system of signification, in which symbols allude both to specific material formations and abstract ideological structures.¹¹ The integration of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in

11 An excellent example of this process is Jonathan Swift's satirical utopia, *Gulliver's Travels*. This dual operation of text, in which it functions both in immediate connection with historical events and as an analysis or reconstruction of abstract ideological categories is, of course, a quality of writing in general. However, it is more overt in utopian writing, which emphasises both its relationship with the historical 'real' and its distance from it, than in most other literary forms or genres. This dual system of signification is not identical with that in Barthes's definition of myth.

the polarised discourse of the Cold War obscured this potential plurality, and imposed upon it instead an identification with a monolithic political position. As Stuart Hall wrote, in 'Conjuring Leviathan: Orwell on the State,'

although *Nineteen Eighty-Four* had deep roots in Orwell's anti-Communism, his experience of Stalinism and his conviction of the revolution betrayed, its central impetus is not exclusively an attack on Soviet Communism, or even the failure of the promise of socialism, but something else: a general hysterical tendency in modern states – the collectivizing impetus and its fateful consequences – which he regarded as well-advanced in Communist and post-liberal capitalist societies alike. (238)

The argument that the novel analyses a 'hysterical tendency' interprets totalitarianism as product of the structure of the modern state and not of a particular political system. In numerous analyses written during the Cold War, however, the images of the debasement of language, the distortion of historical records, and the abuse of political power, were not interpreted as the products of a widespread 'collectivizing impetus' but were absorbed into 'anti-Communism' as accounts of a specific political system. In spite of the protests of those such as Hall, and Julian Symons, who insisted in *1948 and 1984* that 'Orwell had steadily refused to become an expositor of the anti-Soviet propaganda line put out by a variety of Conservatives and Right-wingers, even when they were saying things he agreed with about the dictatorship in the Soviet Union' (22), the novel was deployed as an attack on Soviet Communism.

This identification of tyranny exclusively with the Soviet Union altered the position of the state as the potential subject of utopian narrative. Utopian writing is a form used to analyse the potential results of power. The use of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in 'anti-Communist' propaganda was an appropriation of dystopias and resulted in their erosion as a radical form. The importance of Orwell's writing to post-war literature is demonstrated both

in the critical texts upon it and in its absorption into the public consciousness, a process illustrated in turn by the multiple references to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in the popular press and in continual sales of his work. As John Rodden wrote, in *The Politics of Literary Reputation*, published in 1989, ‘*Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* have sold almost 40 million copies in sixty-odd languages, more than any other pair of books by a serious or popular postwar author’ (16). Indeed, he observes that in the period 1950-56, immediately after Orwell’s death and at the start of the Cold War, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* sold 1,210,000 copies in as a New American Library paperback alone, (46) and was adapted for both radio and television. This position, sustained by the publication of new material, such as the twenty-volume academic edition of the *Complete Works*, edited by Peter Davison, and by media attention, particularly in the year 1984 itself, figured the novel as a significant, even primary model for dystopian writing. The appropriation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the most prominent post-war dystopia, was therefore not a problem restricted to an individual text, but influenced the relationship between the genre and the dominant order. Later utopian narratives used a variety of strategies to evade this identification with Cold War propaganda, and to reconstruct the genre as the site of political protest. This predominantly involved either the replacement of the state as the main subject of satire, or the use of a specific regime, such as Nazism, not identified with Socialism. The evolution of alternative narrative methods illustrates both a response to the interpretative practices of the Cold War and to new social problems.¹² The use of other

12 The historical conditions that informed later utopian works would include factors as diverse, as, for example, the extension of nuclear power, the renewed emphasis on ‘free trade’ by the British and American governments of the 1980s, scientific developments such as an increased understanding of genetic codes, and, of course, the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. It would also include more localised, or ‘minor,’ developments.

literary strategies enables both the identification of a new series of historical tendencies, and the reconstruction of utopian writing as a radical form. This process, in which *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is variously evoked and displaced, can be demonstrated in the examination of a number of late twentieth-century utopias.

In Julian Barnes's *England, England*, the construction of an environment on the Isle of White that incorporates reproductions of famous British historical sites and individuals, exposes problems both of authenticity and of business practices. The Pitco company produce a country in which the tourist can 'visit Stonehenge and Anne Hathaway's Cottage in the same morning, take in a 'ploughman's lunch' atop the White Cliff's of Dover, before passing a leisurely afternoon at the Harrods emporium inside the tower of London' (179-80). The island is a 'peaceable kingdom, a new kind of state, a blueprint for the future' (202), but it is also a state within which the control of historical identities results in an absence of independent reference. In *England, England*,

There was no government – only a disenfranchised Governor – and therefore no elections and no politicians. There were no lawyers except Pitco lawyers. There were no economists except Pitco economists. There was no history except Pitco history. (202)

The absence of a stable historical narrative prevents, as in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the development of independent critical perspectives. The business imposes decisions on the basis of 'contractual law and the executive authority' (187), in an impersonal, efficient administrative system. In addition, despite the introduction by Sir Jack Pitman of policies to remove 'the subversive tendency of certain employees to over-identify with the characters they were engaged to represent' (248), individuals continue to be defined, in both function and identity, by a central authority. The state is not founded upon violence, the image of 'a boot stamping on a human face' (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 280), and indeed conditions in *England, England*

arguably bear more resemblance to those described in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* than those in Oceania. The text does, however, explore the control of historical narratives, in this instance to examine the appropriation of cultural myths by business to consolidate the position of non-democratic, corporate structures motivated by material profit. This managerial structure produces a sterile replication, a historical stasis, that prevents the development of independent traditions. In his replacement of the state with international business, a force positively valued by the dominant ideology of late capitalism, Barnes affirms utopian writing as a critical form.

This emphasis on business is replicated in Ben Elton's environmental dystopias, *Stark*, *Gridlock* and *This Other Eden*. In these novels, destruction is not the result of the policies of a centralised state, but of an economic system that emphasises the immediate interests. In *Stark*, the businessman Sly Moorcock insists that 'you can't bugger about with market forces, that's social engineering, gentlemen, Brave New 1984 and all that' (52), and this commitment to capitalism results in production that disregards ecological damage. The market is represented by the Stark Consortium as both autonomous and of inherent value. Indeed, their spokesman, Professor Durf, states that 'If the earth had to die in the defence of a free market economy, then it is a noble death' (362). This method of organisation prevents action to counteract the 'myriad destruction in every single area of the natural world' (361). As Jurgen Thor states, in *This Other Eden*, 'There is no *profit* to be had today in defending tomorrow' (32). Indeed, the reverse is true. Ecological destruction, and the suppression of ameliorative measures, enable the generation of wealth. In *Gridlock*, Sam Turk concludes, when he obtains the plans for an engine that would emit no pollution, that 'The real money is in *not* producing the engine' (177), but in using it to extort money from oil-producing countries. In *This Other Eden*, Plastic Tolstoy defends his decision to initiate natural disasters for marketing purposes

and states that 'I saw creating a situation that was healthy for investors and employees alike as a moral thing, certainly, and if that meant creating environmental disaster, so be it' (410). This emphasis upon the market results in a dystopia produced, not by an authoritarian state, but by diverse businesses unified by their pursuit of profit. This model subverts the concept of capitalist production and consumption as the realisation of individual freedom. Instead, it identifies the hierarchies of power, exploitation and deception that define the market economy, as well as the divisions between short-term private profit and long-term collective objectives. The novels displace emphasis from the state and represent a dystopia founded upon 'market forces,' the mythic structures integral to the ideology that shapes and legitimises late capitalist society.

In Stephen Fry's *Making History* and Robert Harris's *Fatherland*, the totalitarian state is retained to analyse alternative historical potentials. However, the novels both use Nazism, a movement with a defined historical identity, as the basis of their narratives, a decision that prevents the political division of critical interpretations. In both works the Germans are victorious in the Second World War and secure peace with America after their mutual development of nuclear weapons.¹³ This victory enables, not only the completion of the 'Final Solution,' achieved in *Making History* by the sterilisation of the Jews, but its concealment. In *Fatherland*, the few survivors who talk of 'execution pits, medical experiments, camps that people went into but never came out of' are contradicted by the German ambassador who informs people that the reports are 'communist propaganda' (210). In addition, the American

13 In the alternative world of *Making History*, Hitler's birth is prevented, and the Germans are led by Rudi Gloder, a more intellectual, pragmatic politician, who is able to suppress his anti-Semitism until he has secured the support of scientists at the Göttingen institute and other centres of scientific research, who enable the early development of nuclear weapons.

journalist Charlotte Macguire informs the protagonist, Xavier March, ‘people don’t care’ (210). History books detail ‘the mass graves of Stalin’s victims’ (211), but the investigation of the fate of the European Jewish population is prevented as a result of diplomatic efforts to end the Cold War between America and Europe. In *Making History*, when details of the sterilisation are revealed, an American state agent, Brown, insists: ‘It’s history. It’s all just history. Might as well make a stink about the Black Hole of Calcutta or the Salem Witch Trials’ (420).

The destruction of evidence of the Holocaust enables the consolidation of state power, in a process that evokes the Party slogan in Oceania ‘Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past’ (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* 260). The control of the means of representation is used to limit the political perspectives of those ruled and prevent the development of independent traditions. The absence of historical evidence prevents the use of the past to support individual political or moral positions. In *Fatherland*, when March has revealed this knowledge of the extermination camps, Globus, tells him, ‘They’re just names, March. There’s nothing there any more, not even a brick. Nobody will ever believe you’ (364).¹⁴ The absence of individual historical records results in a continuous reconstruction of the past to legitimise present state policies, a process in which, as in Oceania, ‘the past was brought up to date’ (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* 42). Indeed, the novels incorporate numerous parallels and even direct references to Orwell. In *Fatherland*, progressive student movements in Europe circulate ‘crudely printed copies’ of ‘Günter Grass and Graham Greene, George Orwell and J. D. Salinger’ (17). In the parallel

14 Material history remains important in both *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Fatherland*. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston is fascinated by objects from the past, including the keepsake album he uses as a diary and the paperweight that symbolises his relationship with Julia. In *Fatherland*, March is determined to see for himself the bricks, ‘pitted with yellow lichen’ (382), that remain of Auschwitz.

universe of *Making History*, Orwell was ‘shot in the ‘39 British rebellion’ but wrote *Darkness Falls*, which is ‘the masterpiece of the free world’ (448). *Nineteen Eighty-Four* functions as a cultural myth within the context of which these alternative histories are interpreted. The texts evade the binary political forms that determined the reception of Orwell’s work by focusing on Nazism, a specific totalitarian state. This prevents the complete absorption of the dystopias into the dominant discourse, and enables the form to be used to destabilise the image of Western Europe and America as inherently humanitarian. In *Making History*, homosexuality is prohibited in America and racial divisions are socially accepted. In *Fatherland*, the American president, Joseph Kennedy, described by Charlotte Macguire as an ‘appeaser’ and ‘anti-Semite’ (120), pursues a policy of reconciliation with a Nazi government still headed by Hitler. The construction of utopian narratives that use a historically specific regime to resist integration within the polarised interpretative model produced by the Cold War enables their persistence as a form of social criticism.

The reception of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and its use in Cold War propaganda, produced an interpretative environment in which dystopian representations of the state were used to demonstrate opposition to Communism, and therefore, in the binary categories of the period, support for the ‘free world.’ This appropriation of the genre eroded its function as a method of protest and analysis. Utopian narratives are used to extrapolate ideas and analyse their potential consequences. This process obviously involves the incorporation of material from the period of the work’s production, but its satirical or allegorical structure, its explicitly fictive location, whatever parallels it has to historical ‘reality,’ produces an implicit plurality, a potential for reinterpretation and redeployment. The appropriation of this subversive, multiple form by the dominant ideology, the reception of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as an ‘anti-Communist’ text, informed the subsequent evolution of the

genre. The displacement in emphasis, from the state to other organisations such as businesses, and the use of historically specific regimes, such as the Nazis, that could not be interpreted as a symbolic representation of Socialist government, enabled the dislocation of the interpretative structures produced in the Cold War. There are, of course, exceptions to this displacement of the state. In Anthony Burgess's novel *A Clockwork Orange*, for example, it remains the dominant social force, and in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, it is used to control reproduction and legitimise the subordination of women.¹⁵ The texts both disrupt the conventional model of centralised government, but retain the state as the locus of social control. The displacement of emphasis is therefore not a uniform development, but a tendency, one solution to a literary and historical problem, an attempt to reproduce utopian writing as a medium of social criticism.

At the end of “‘1984’ – The Mysticism of Cruelty,’ Isaac Deutscher wrote:

‘Have you read this book? You must read it, sir. Then you will know why we must drop the atom bomb on the Bolshies!’ With these words a blind, miserable newsvendor recommended to me *1984* in New York, a few weeks before Orwell’s death. (40)

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- 15 Feminist dystopias, such as Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, or Katherine Burdekin’s 1937 novel *Swastika Night* (first published under the pseudonym Murray Constantine) are a distinct form of utopian writing. They function within the broader genre, but the emphasis upon gender, and frequently upon the control of reproduction, results in an evolution that is the product of its relation both to the genre as a whole and to the feminist movement in particular. The analysis of social processes in terms of gender oppression, which is argued by many writers to be a constant element of diverse political practices, enables the retention of the state as a locus of criticism, although it is not, of course, its exclusive object.

The anecdote reinforces his image of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as 'a superweapon in the cold war,' integrated into the doctrine of 'anti-Communism.' The text, as an analytical, satirical structure, is received as propaganda for an established political position. As Raymond Williams wrote, in *The Long Revolution*, 'People use art and thought (often deeply distorting actual works) to confirm their own patterns' (120), and this reception of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, by critics of varied political persuasions, demonstrates the polarised intellectual practices of the Cold War period. In addition, this dominant interpretation, from which the novel, as a cultural artefact, cannot finally be separated, influenced the subsequent evolution of utopian writing. These later texts used alternative strategies to construct dystopian narratives which resisted identification with an ideology that equated the totalitarian state with 'Communism,' an amorphous term that incorporated diverse forms of Socialist and radical thought. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* remained a model for these works, which frequently replicate its images, concepts and narrative structures. However, its appropriation resulted in a process of evolution intended to evade and destabilise the interpretative models that defined the work in the Cold War. The emphasis on business and the use of specific historical movements, such as Nazism, which cannot be represented as Socialist, enable the criticism of these later historical periods. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has been a dominant influence on later works, but the evolution of the genre has resulted in works that do not replicate it, but are homologous, in terms of their social and political function. The resistance to identification with the binary categories of the Cold War asserts the status of utopian writing as a form of criticism and the freedom, as Orwell wrote in 'The Freedom of the Press,' 'to tell people what they do not want to hear' (*Complete Works* 17: 260).

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